

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

North Star

The story of a Dog'
by

Rufus
King



10¢ PER
COPY

FEBRUARY 7

BY THE \$4.00
YEAR

“We are advertised
by our loving friends”



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Winterport, Maine.



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The use of the Mellin's Food Method of Milk Modification will enable your little one to have the healthy and robust appearance so typical of all Mellin's Food babies.

We will be pleased to send you our book, "The Care and Feeding of Infants," also a Free Trial Bottle of Mellin's Food.

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YOU can turn my training into money quick. In a few weeks after you enroll for my course I show you where and how to get spare time electrical work and teach you how to do it. I give you a complete outfit of tools and apparatus to work with. My training pays for itself many times over, even while you are learning. Hundreds of my students earn \$25 to \$35 a week in their spare time, while they are getting ready for a big job—all without losing a single hour from their regular work.

Administration Building of the Chicago Engineering Works, the Million Dollar Institution which stands behind my guarantees. My Electrical Laboratory occupies another big building similar to this.

GET INTO ELECTRICITY. The world's biggest and most fascinating business needs you. Ordinary electricians earn \$8 to \$10 a day, but thousands of the biggest jobs—the ones that pay \$12 to \$30 a day, are going begging for want of *trained* men to fill them. Why stick to your small-pay, no-future job? In a few short months time with my training you can be an Electrical Expert earning \$70 to \$200 a week and not work half so hard as you do now.

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Thousands of new power stations—millions of automobiles—the wildfire spread of Radio and an undreamed of demand for electric light and power—all these things demand more and more trained men. The industry will be sadly crippled without these men—they must be had at any cost. That's why salaries are high and why they will stay high in Electricity.

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I am an engineer with college training and 20 years of practical experience. I have employed and directed the work of thousands of electrical men. I know what a man needs, to be a big success in Electricity. That's what I give you in my course—20 years of practical experience simplified, and made easy for you to understand. My course is the recognized best and most successful training of its kind in America.

JOBS—How I Get Them For My Students

I am spending over \$25,000 a year to get jobs for my students. This money is actually spent on Employment Service alone. And I do get jobs for my students, even before they finish my course. They don't have to wait until they graduate. It is easy for me to do this because employers of electrical help know that "Cooke" Trained Men KNOW Electricity. They know that "Cooke" Trained Men are the best men they can get.

My 16 Big Guarantees

I don't promise you anything—I **Guarantee** it with a signed bond backed up by a Million Dollar Institution. It says, "You get your money back if you are not satisfied." There are no strings to this guarantee—you alone are the judge. Among the things I guarantee besides Free Employment Service are—use of my big Laboratory—Accommodations when you visit Chicago—Lifetime subscription to monthly Engineering Magazine—Consultation and Vocational Service—a big outfit of Tools and Apparatus—all **FREE**. Some of these things are exclusive with my training—you can't get them anywhere else.

Investigate! Get the Proof! Big Electrical Book FREE!

You want proof? You want facts? These I give you in my big book—The "Vital Facts" about Electricity—Proof that opportunities more wonderful than you ever dreamed of await you—Proof that "Cooke" Trained Men **do** get the big jobs in Electricity and that I can do more for you than anyone else. Send for my book now. Be a "Cooke" Trained Electrical Expert—Earn \$70 to \$200 a week. Mail the coupon **Now**.

L. L. Cooke, Chief Engineer

CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS

Dept. 172

2150 Lawrence Ave.,
CHICAGO



The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

My Boy's Get the Big Jobs in Electricity

**\$800 to \$1000 a
Month for Jirinec**



is responsible for his success.

In business for himself doing electrical work, John Jirinec, 1133 Fourth Ave., Astoria, L.I., New York, makes over \$10,000.00 per year. He says "C o o k e" Training alone

**Pence Earns Over
\$750 Every Month**

W. E. Pence of Albany, Oregon, specializes in Auto Electricity and makes \$750.00 a month. Was formerly a mechanic earning \$30.00 a week. The Auto Electrical Experts have the "white collar" job in Automobile work.



**Jumps from \$5 a
Day to \$5000 a Year**



hundreds of men. "Cooke" Training made this possible.

This is the 18 months' record of A. F. Klenz, 25 Chase Block, Saginaw, Mich. New State Superintendent for Miller York Construction Company. Klenz handles big jobs and directs

My Free Book contains letters just like these from over 100 other big successful "Cooke" Trained Men.

**Mail
this
Coupon
for my
FREE
BOOK**

L. L. COOKE,
Chief Engineer,

**Chicago Engineering Works, Dept. 172
2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago**

Send me your book "The Vital Facts About Electricity," full particulars of your Home Study Course, and your 16 guarantees including your plan for helping me earn extra money while learning and details of your Free Employment Service. This does not obligate me to enroll for your course.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Occupation.....

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLXVI

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NUMBER 4

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

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GOLD FROM THE CAÑON

By Arthur Preston Hankins

There was gold aplenty in the Pipe-organ country, and Linneus Columbia located it. Then came trouble, in double-barreled doses, and it took all the brains and all the fight that was in Lin to get the gold out. He did it, but— Follow his adventures in the six part serial beginning next week.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
LENNOX HOUSE, NORFOLK STREET, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.2

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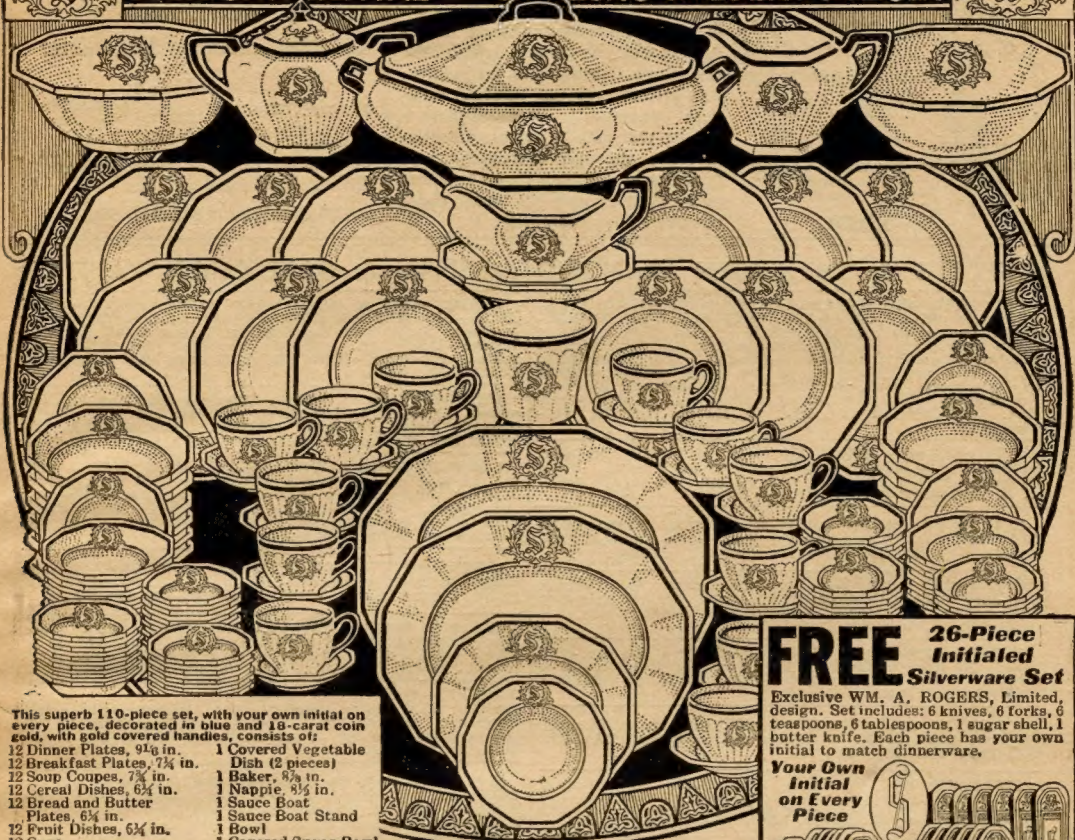
CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered.

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Entered as second-class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

YOUR OWN INITIAL IN 4 COLORS ON EVERY PIECE!



This superb 110-piece set, with your own initial on every piece, decorated in blue and 18-carat coin gold, with gold covered handles, consists of:

- 12 Dinner Plates, 9 1/4 in.
- 12 Breakfast Plates, 7 1/4 in.
- 12 Soup Coupes, 7 1/4 in.
- 12 Cereal Dishes, 6 1/4 in.
- 12 Bread and Butter Plates, 6 1/4 in.
- 12 Fruit Dishes, 6 1/4 in.
- 12 Cups
- 12 Saucers
- 1 Platter, 11 1/4 in.
- 1 Platter, 13 1/4 in.
- 1 Covered Vegetable Dish (2 pieces)
- 1 Baker, 8 1/4 in.
- 1 Nappie, 8 1/4 in.
- 1 Sauce Boat
- 1 Sauce Boat Stand
- 1 Bowl
- 1 Covered Sugar Bowl (2 pieces)
- 1 Creamer
- 1 Pickle Dish
- 1 Batter Dish, 6 1/4 in.

Only Brings 110-Piece 18-Carat Coin Gold Decorated DINNER SET

It's easy to get this superb 110-piece 18-carat coin gold-decorated Dinner Set with your own initial in beautiful colors on every piece. Read offer from Hartman, the Largest Home Furnishing Concern in the World. Then send while

bargain price holds good, and receive with it, absolutely FREE, the beautiful 26-piece Silverware Set, made exclusively for Hartman's by WM. A. ROGERS, Limited, initialed to match dinnerware. Just pin a dollar bill to the coupon below, and mail today.

Newest and Finest in DINNERWARE, Blue and 18-Carat Coin Gold Richly Decorated

Both Sets Have Your Own Initial on Every Piece

The quality of this set, its snowy white lustre and decorations compare with the finest imported ware. Your own initial in colors on every piece surrounded by gorgeously colored decorations. All handles covered with 18-carat coin gold, and each piece has 18-carat coin gold border and rich blue follow band.

FREE INITIALED SILVERWARE SET TO MATCH MADE BY WM. A. ROGERS, Limited

Only \$1 with coupon brings complete 110-piece set and with it FREE, the 26-piece initialed Silverware Set. If not satisfied after 30 days' trial, return both sets and we refund your \$1 and pay transportation charges both ways. Otherwise, take nearly a year to pay balance due on 110-piece set only—a little every month. Silverware is free. State initial wanted.

Order by No. 322GMA18.

Bargain Price of 110-Piece Dinner Set, \$39.98. \$1 with Order. \$4 Monthly. Silverware Set is FREE.

IMPORTANT! Hartman guarantees every piece in this set is absolutely first quality—no "seconds." The 18-carat coin gold decoration is guaranteed not to wash or wear off. This is a standard or "open" pattern. Replacement pieces may be had of us for 3 years. Excellent packing to prevent breakage.

FREE 26-Piece Initialed Silverware Set

Exclusive WM. A. ROGERS, Limited, design. Set includes: 6 knives, 6 forks, 6 teaspoons, 6 tablespoons, 1 sugar shell, 1 butter knife. Each piece has your own initial to match dinnerware.

Your Own Initial on Every Piece



FREE Bargain Catalog

Hundreds of pages of the world's greatest bargains in Furniture, rugs, carpets, home furnishings, etc.—all sold on easy monthly payment terms; 30 days' free trial.

Free Gifts! Book explains how you get Glassware, Silverware, Jewelry, Table Linens, etc., FREE. Write for Catalog No. F7256. "Let Hartman Feather YOUR Nest!"

Just Pin a Dollar Bill to Coupon—MAIL TODAY

HARTMAN FURNITURE & CARPET CO. Dept. 7256 Chicago, Illinois

Print Initial You Want Here

110-Piece 18-Carat Coin Gold Decorated Dinner Set No. 322GMA18, Price \$39.98, and with it the 26-Piece Silverware Set, absolutely FREE. I am to pay nothing further for goods on arrival—only the small freight charges. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If satisfied, I will send you \$4 monthly until full price of Dinner Set, \$39.98, is paid. Will pay nothing at any time for the 26-Piece Silverware Set. Title remains with you until paid in full. If not satisfied after 30 days' free trial, I will ship all goods back and you will refund my \$1 and pay transportation charges both ways.

Name.....

R. F. D., Box No. or Street and No.

Town..... State.....

HARTMAN FURNITURE & CARPET CO. Dept. 7256 Copyright, 1925, by Hartman's, Chicago, Ill. **The Largest Home Furnishing Concern in the World**



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	Combination Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	\$1.50	\$5.00
Argosy-Allstory	2.50	Less 2% cash discount
Weekly	1.00	
Flynn's	1.00	
Minimum space four lines.		

Mar 14th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close Feb. 14th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

SALESMEN AND MERCHANTS WITH OR WITHOUT EXPERIENCE SELL OUR GUARANTEED ALL WOOL TAILOR-MADE double pants suits at \$28.50 and up. Nothing like it shown in the entire market. Every garment made to individual measure, fit and workmanship guaranteed. You are at liberty to set your own selling prices, own your business, without any investment. Write for Spring switch line, over 250 large size samples including attractive carrying case. Territory now open. **JAY ROSE & CO.**, Dept. 75, 411 So. Wells St., Chicago, Ill.

LIVE AGENTS MAKE \$10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. **A. D. Seed Filter & Mfg. Company**, 73 Franklin, New York.

\$5.00 HOUR TAKING ORDERS JACKSON "2.95 COMBINATION COAT" Demonstrating coat, selling outfit FREE. **Jackson Raincoat**, Dept. M, 720 Roosevelt, Chicago.

BIG MONEY Selling New Household Cleaning Set. Washes and dries windows, Sweeps, scrubs, mops. All complete only \$2.95. Over half profit. Write **Harper Brush Works**, 329 Grimes Street, Fairfield, Iowa.

AGENTS—\$60—\$200 A WEEK. Guaranteed Genuine Gold Letters for store windows. Anyone can put them on. Free samples. Liberal offer to general agents. **METALLIC LETTER CO.**, 427A N. Clark St., Chicago.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. **CARNATION CO.**, Dept. 200, St. Louis, Mo.

SALESMEN: Sell Four Square Suits \$12.50. Five patterns, \$3.00 to \$5.50 each sale. Profits in advance. Complete line coats, vests, pants, riding pants, overcoats, slippers, caps. One day delivery. **K. Stone-Field**, 2556 Wabash, Chicago.

AGENTS—WRITE FOR FREE SAMPLES. Sell Madison "Better-Made" shirts for large manufacturer direct to wearer. No capital or experience required. Many earn \$100 weekly and bonus. **MADISON MILLS**, 564 Broadway, New York.

CLOTHING SENSATION: New line of men's clothes. All wool suits all at one low price of \$23.50. We pay biggest commissions cash with order and supply finest selling outfit. Experience isn't necessary. If you're honest and willing to work we'll train you. Address Dept. 233 **WILLIAM C. BARTLETT, Inc.**, 850 West Adams Street, Chicago.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge \$1.50, make \$1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. **AMERICAN MONOGRAM CO.**, Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

WE PAY \$200 MONTHLY SALARY, furnish car and expenses to introduce our guaranteed poultry and stock powders. **BIGLER COMPANY**, X506, Springfield, Illinois.

AGENTS to travel by automobile to introduce our fast selling, popular priced household necessities. The greatest line on earth. Make \$10 a day. Complete outfit and automobile furnished free to workers. Write today for exclusive territory. **AMERICAN PRODUCTS COMPANY**, 2421 American Building, Cincinnati, Ohio.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN TO SELL your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the 3,000,000 readers of the Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, Argosy Combination, 280 B'way, New York.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR \$3—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, criticized, published, copyrighted, marketed. Advice free. **UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP.**, 299 Security Bldg., Santa Monica and Western Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AGENTS—\$15 A DAY—EASY, QUICK SALES—FREE AUTO—BIG WEEKLY BONUS—\$1.50 premium Free to every customer. Simply show our Beautiful, 7 piece, Solid Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Appeals instantly. We deliver and collect. Pay daily. **NEW ERA MFG. CO.**, 803 Madison St., Dept. 20CW, Chicago.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. **W. Hillyer Ragsdale**, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

I PAY MEN \$100 A WEEK, selling our fine made-to-measure, all-wool suits—Direct to wearer—All ONE price, \$31.50. Biggest Values. Highest Commissions in advance. We deliver and collect. 6x9 swatch samples furnished. Write today. State selling experience fully. **W. Z. Gibson Inc.**, 161 W. Harrison St., Dept. B-469, Chicago.

LIGHTNING STRANGE BATTERY COMPOUND. Charges discharged batteries instantly. Eliminates old method entirely. Gallon free to agents. **LIGHTNING CO.**, St. Paul, Minn.

Take orders \$9.50 WEARWELL Guaranteed Suits and Topcoats. Neat in appearance and serviceable. Your commission \$3.00. Selling outfit FREE. Prompt delivery. Territory open. Consumers-Wearwell Mfg. Co., 720M Roosevelt, Chicago.

AGENTS—\$1.25 an hour for spare time. Show samples and introduce teas, coffees, spices, extracts, food products—things people eat. Get our big free sample assortment offer—19 full size packages right out of stock. **Harley Co.**, B-2171 Harley Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.

\$5.00 HOUR TAKING ORDERS "DIXIE \$2.95 COMBINATION COAT" Demonstrating coat, selling outfit FREE. **Dixie Raincoat**, Dept. M, 720 Roosevelt, Chicago.

EVERYBODY BUYS new, instant stain and rust remover. For clothing, table linen, etc. Fine premium with every sale. Big, Quick Profits. Free Outfit. Write today. **Christy**, 56 Union, Newark, New York.

WINTER AUTO SPECIALTY—Repair couplers for tire chains—mends broken links quickly—car users, garages, dealers all good prospects. 100% profit. **Colyt Laboratories, Engineering**, 565 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill. (3055)

AGENTS—Be independent, make big profit with our soap, toilet articles and household necessities. Get free sample case offer. **HO-RO-CO**, 2718 Dodier, St. Louis, Mo.

Tailoring Salesmen: Our guaranteed \$21.50 and \$31.50 all wool tailored to order suits are \$10 to \$20 cheaper than store prices. Commission in advance. Protected territory. Beautiful assortment 6x9 swatches free. Manager, Dept. 1034, 843 Adams, Chicago.

HAVE YOU SEEN? The New BeeGee Line—get our 1925 Catalogue and stop worrying about what to sell. You'll be satisfied with what you make. **B. & G. Rubber Co.**, Dept. 717, Pittsburgh, Pa.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

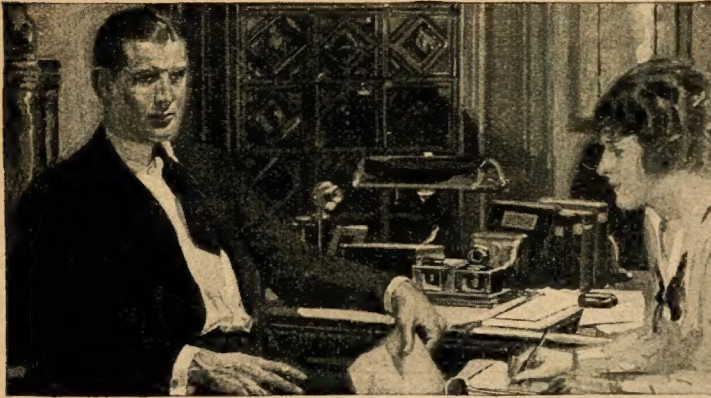
STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED FOR PUBLICATION. GOOD IDEAS BRING BIG MONEY. SUBMIT MSS., OR WRITE LITERARY BUREAU, 110, HANNIBAL, MO.

EARN \$25 WEEKLY, SPARE TIME, writing for newspapers, magazines. Experience unnecessary. Copyright book free. Press Syndicate, 997, St. Louis, Mo.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

20 ACRES OR MORE OF OUR BEST LAND IN MICHIGAN. \$20 per acre. 25¢ per acre down; balance your own terms. 52 page book free. **Swigart Land Co.**, Y-1245, First National Bank Bldg., Chicago.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



Making Successful Men by Home-Study Training

How can I make more money? How can I advance more rapidly in business? Literally millions of untrained men—yourself, perhaps, among them—are continually disturbed by those two questions.

"Be industrious; keep everlastingly at it"—that's the way the writers of *copy-book maxims* would tell you to go about it. But honestly—are you fooled by that sort of talk?

Argue it any way you like, it takes something beside mere *work* to push men ahead—it takes *specialized* work.

And to suggest, for a second, that an untrained man—no matter how hard he works—is going to be promoted to a highly specialized position without first *equipping* himself for that position, is as absurd as to intimate that the boatman in the park who has been on the job for twenty years is likely to be chosen captain of a trans-Atlantic liner!

* * *

Recognizing these facts—what is the wise thing to do to change one's situation for the better?

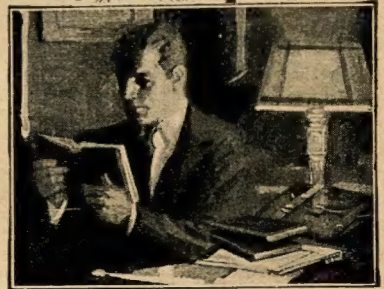
Many will tell you that promotion will take care of itself—if you keep your eyes open.

It will. *But, oh, how slowly!*

While one man is advancing by this tedious route from \$25-a-week to \$30-a-week to \$35-a-week, another chap, not a bit smarter than he, is climbing from \$15-a-week to \$30-a-week to \$50-a-week to \$100-a-week.

No—there's more to advancement than merely "catching onto things." TIME is the all-important factor—and that is the big reason why thousands of earnest men have refused to wait, but have turned instead to LaSalle Extension University and have shortened by many years their journey to success.

That they—in so doing—have acted to their own advantage is borne out by the fact that during only three months' time as many as 1193 members reported definite advancement which they were frank to attribute to home-study training under the LaSalle Problem Method. The total salary-increases so reported amounted to \$1,248,526, an average increase per man of eighty-nine per cent.



Your future is, of course, your own problem—and no one can solve it but yourself. If you are content to drift, you will find plenty of company the little profit.

If, on the other hand, you are really in earnest when you say that you want to get ahead in business, you will find both companionship and gain in home-study training under the LaSalle Problem Method.

Below this text there's a coupon—very similar to the one which has set many, many thousands on the path to success.

A good way to gauge your strength of purpose is—by what you do with that coupon—NOW

LaSalle Extension University

The Largest Business Training Institution
in the World

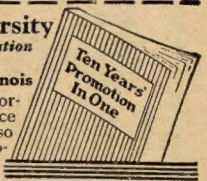
Dept. 232-R

Chicago, Illinois

Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation to me.

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Modern Salesmanship
- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ Law—Degree of LL.B.
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Railway Station Management
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Efficiency
- ☐ Banking and Finance

- ☐ Modern Business Correspondence and Practice
- ☐ Modern Foremanship and Production Methods
- ☐ Personnel and Employment Management
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Commercial Spanish
- ☐ Effective Speaking
- ☐ C.P.A. Coaching



Name

Present Position

Address

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

DIAMONDS-WATCHES

Sent for inspection
without one
penny down



No security required, no red tape; we trust you absolutely. Examine diamond at your leisure—wear it 30 days FREE. Send it back at our expense if not entirely satisfactory. You are not out a penny. Do not wait longer—a few cents a day will make you the owner of a sparkling, perfectly cut, blue-white diamond, set in 18 Karat Purity White Gold.

New Low Prices and Terms None Can Beat

Why pay full price? Examine our diamonds. It costs nothing to see diamonds. After being thoroughly satisfied it's the biggest value for your money you ever saw, keep the ring and pay balance in small monthly payments.

Wear 30 Days
FREE



Solid Gold Case
Illinois
Movement

Ladies' New Elite Wrist Watch

This artistic, dependable Ladies' Wrist Watch fitted with genuine Illinois Springfield movements. A perfect timepiece. Beautiful 14 Karat white or green solid gold cases. Ask for New Watch Book showing cases in all the new shapes and designs. Watch sent on approval and sold on payments. \$3.50 a month.

FREE—Watch and
Diamond
catalog sent post-
paid. Send
for yours
today.



Wedding Rings

Beautiful hand-
engraved Purity White
Gold Wedding Ring to
match diamond rings.
\$2.00 a Month

Santa Fe Watch Co.

Sole Distributor of the Santa Fe Special Watch

SANTA FE WATCH COMPANY,
278 Thomas Building, Topeka, Kansas

Please send prepaid and without obligation your Watch and Diamond Book Free, explaining your "No Money Down" Offer on Watches and Diamonds.

Name.....

Address.....

State.....

HELP WANTED

MAKE MONEY AT HOME WRITING SHOWCARDS. We instruct and provide work. KWIK SHOWCARD, 61V Bond St., Toronto, Can.

BE A DETECTIVE—Earn Big Money. Great demand everywhere. Travel. Fascinating work. Make secret investigations. Experience unnecessary. Write, GEORGE A. WAGNER, former Government Detective, 1968 Broadway, N. Y.

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BE A DETECTIVE—Exceptional opportunity; earn big money. Travel. Thousands of dollars offered in rewards. Established in 1909. Particulars free. Write C. T. LUDWIG, 126-B Westover Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

MEN wanting forest ranger, railway mail clerk and other government positions, \$1500-\$2400 year. Write for free particulars. MOKANE, Dept. A-31, Denver, Colo.

All men, women, boys, girls, 17 to 65, willing to accept Government Positions, \$117—\$250, traveling or stationary Write Mr. OZMENT, 198, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

EARN \$110 TO \$250 MONTHLY. EXPENSES PAID AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., Buffalo, N. Y.

DETECTIVE AGENCY—Licensed and Bonded. Opportunities for ambitious men and women. Experience unnecessary. 20 lessons free. CLARKE SYSTEM, Box 239, Providence, R. I.

FARM LANDS—CANADA

SEIZED AND SOLD FOR TAXES.

\$ 45 for 5 acres, beautiful lake front.
\$ 50 for 10 acres, hunting camp site.
\$ 92 for 50 acres, mixed farming, good market.
\$315 for 160 acres, wheat and dairy farm, Manitoba.
\$378 for claim near mines that have paid millions.

Lots from 1/4 acre to 2 square miles suitable for hunting, fishing, farming, mining, lumbering, summer cottages, camp sites, etc. All offered at ten cents on the dollar of their value. \$5 and \$10 down and easy monthly payments. Send for illustrated list describing the above and hundreds of properties seized and sold for taxes. Send no money, send for list to-day so you will have first choice. Tax Sale Service, 72 Queen Street, West District 918, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

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North Star

By RUFUS KING

FOREWORD

THE justification for this story lies in a speech made many years ago by the late Senator Vest of Missouri in the course of the trial of a man who had wantonly shot a dog belonging to a neighbor. Delivered at a time when the dog perhaps held a greater place in the affections of men than he does to-day, its philosophy and summation of a dog's instincts and character will be justly held by all dog lovers to be true for any age. In spite of the forensic bombast of the style, its force and truth are so great that one cannot read it without a mist coming before one's eyes:

"Gentlemen of the Jury: The best friend a man has in this world may turn against him and become his enemy. His son or daughter that he has reared with loving care may prove ungrateful. Those who are nearest and dearest to us, those whom we trust with our happiness and our good name, may become traitors to their faith. The money that a man has he may lose. It flies away from him, perhaps when he needs it most. A man's reputation may be sacrificed in a moment of ill-considered action. The people who are prone to fall on their knees to do us honor when success is with us may be the first to throw the stone of malice when failure settles its cloud above our heads. The one absolutely

unselfish friend that man can have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him, the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous, is his dog.

"Gentlemen of the jury, a man's dog stands by him in prosperity and in poverty, in health and in sickness. He will sleep on the cold ground, where the wintry winds blow and the snow drives fiercely, if only he may be near his master's side. He will kiss the hand that has no food to offer, he will lick the wounds and sores that come in encounter with the roughness of the world. He guards the sleep of his pauper master as if he were a prince. When all other friends desert he remains. When riches take wings and reputation falls to pieces he is as constant in his love as the sun in its journey through the heavens. If fortune drives the master forth an outcast in the world, friendless and homeless, the faithful dog asks no bigger privilege than that of accompanying him to guard against danger, to fight against his enemies, and when the last scene of all comes, and death takes the master in its embrace and his body is laid away in the cold ground, no matter if all other friends pursue their way, there by his graveside will the noble dog be found, his head between his paws, his eyes sad but open in alert watchfulness, faithful and true even to death."

CHAPTER I.

SMOLDERING EMBERS.

THE city of New York beneath its intricate illumination faced the night like a complacent woman, obscure behind the barbaric splendor of her jewels. Fifth Avenue flashed through its heart as a cold, discreet lance of white silver. Broadway flared with gaudier lavishment its scarlet needle north and south. The lesser streets glittered crosswise like hot drops flung from the center of some molten flame.

The May air held the softness of an early spring while above, unseen through the distractions of the city's artificial glare, the stars arranged their patterns in an infinite variety.

And to the north, calm, steadfast, the North Star offered its clear loveliness to the unseeing eyes of seven million beings. The swift passage of innumerable cars flooded all lanes that led to pleasure, while along their sidewalks moved a million afoot. The restless energy of a gayety that must be striven for made the crowds electric. A hum, a throb of noise, the blending of a million chattering tongues, the blare of sirens, the strident clangor of a street car, laughs, snatches of jests, of oaths, rolled upward like the rip and sighing of some distant surf.

Two thousand odd miles to the north and to the west, a solitary cabin maintained its lonely state in a small clearing in the great pine woods. There was no sound within it or without. Its heavy wooden shutters were closed and fastened tight. Its door was barred.

It squatted in lumpy insignificance at the base of a proud, tall tree, and cast its minute shadow on the ground beneath the clear, unsullied brilliance of an indifferent moon. In the hush of the keen night air there arose the chill howl of a wolf.

Lexington Avenue, in the city of New York, was receiving that evening the unusual distinction of a great number of expensive motor cars. They were moving in a frequently halted stream toward the Crystal Palace. It was the opening night of a new event in the city's social activities. For the first time in its history the Camp Fire Club was staging an international exhibition. There were to be present the city's social leaders, luminaries from the world of art, the theater, the motion picture, and the government. Incidentally, there would also be on exhibit objects of interest to sportsmen and to lovers of the outdoors from all parts of the world.

Marcia Gale, with a frankness that was only equalled by her costume, turned sideways and surveyed her brother. Their motor car was still two blocks away from the entrance to the Crystal Palace, and she would have, she knew, a good quarter of an hour in which to make up her mind. She possessed the unusual ability so to do, had she desired, in as many seconds.

Wilbur."

The word angled for his attention, and the sharpness of her inflection caught it. Wilbur Gale smiled, wavered sleepy hazel eyes in the approximate direction of Marcia, hiccuped, looked tremendously serious for a minute, removed a handkerchief from the sleeve of his dinner jacket, flirted it casually in the air, tapped his ear with it, replaced it, and resigned himself again to slumber.

Marcia continued looking at him, studying his weak, handsome face in the glow cast from the streets. She dissociated herself entirely from the relationship existing between them, and examined him with the impartial pertinency that a scientist might bend upon an impaled beetle.

Of course, he was drunk. But was he too drunk? She didn't fear so much that he would make a scene. He never made scenes; neither was he ever influenced by any scenes that might revolve around him. But he might continue to keep falling asleep even after they had left the comfortable complacency of the car's deep cushions. It was the third time she had had to awaken him since they had left their house upon the Avenue.

Would it be better to drive home? But she did not want to drive home. She wanted to go to the opening. Apart from its social importance, there was a particular reason why she wanted to go. His name was Dick Robbins. He was a friend of her brother's. Exclusively so, as Wilbur significantly pointed out.

He strongly objected, in fact, to Marcia having anything to do with Robbins at all. Whereas, Robbins, who had until then been attractive in an ordinary way, at once became enormously interesting—a brand to be snatched from unspoken fires. He would be at the crush to-night; he had called her up and told her so.

"Wilbur."

Her wrist gleamed with the flash of a broad bracelet of diamonds as she reached out and poked him.

"Stop it, Susie," said Wilbur.

Marcia's eyes narrowed to reflective slits. She had three names; but none of them was Susie. Nor did she know any Susie. Nor did she, she decided, after having mentally scanned the list of their mutual acquaint-

ances and found the name missing, much want to.

"You'd better wake up," she said. "We are almost there."

Wilbur aroused himself to a tremendous pitch of interest. He stared largely through the windows.

"Where?" he asked.

She smothered an impatient exclamation. It sounded like a syllable of profanity, and may have been.

"You're ruining yourself," she said shortly.

Wilbur smiled charmingly and agreed.

"It is my solitary contribution," he said pleasantly, "to the cause of reform. Where would our good works be if martyrs like myself did not voluntarily offer objects for redemption?"

"At least you're waking up."

"That statement is implied libel. You are inferring that I was asleep."

"You were enough asleep to call me Susie."

She noted neither with nor without satisfaction the color drain slowly from his cheeks and his eyes take on a peculiar sultry brilliance.

"I called you Susie?" he asked in a sobered voice.

"You did."

It annoyed her to read in his expression a suggestion that might be translated as fear. Their stock was noted for its courage. There had been moments, since their parents' death, when she had had cause to wonder at Wilbur.

"I apologize," he said, and gave definite indications that he preferred to have the subject dropped. It was not that the name Susie signified anything in particular. It was one of any dozen names of girls who glittered like motes through the smoke of parties given by a certain crowd which he desired his sister to know nothing about—a crowd that was more or less led by Dickie Robbins.

There was nothing viciously harmful in the parties, but there was nothing in the slightest of good. And at the last one—He did not like to think about the last one.

The door to the motor was opened, and

they stepped to the curb, crossed beneath a canopy of brilliant lights, and entered the broad foyer of the Crystal Palace. They joined the crush in an ascending elevator, innocuous to the press of hot bodies, the scent of perfume, of powder, of cigar smoke, of liquor, good and bad, that swiftly filled the small space. The car came to a smooth stop, and the men, with stolid politeness, milled uncomfortably about until the women had been forced to struggle through the doors.

"Pine," said Marcia. "They've created a distinct effect of pines. Smell it?"

Wilbur nodded briefly and led his sister to their box in the large exhibition hall where the show was being held. The scenery was by Vyrban, and the effect was one of startling reality. The trunks of tall trees rose from a great carpet of pine needles and moss. Great shafts of light splotched downward through a lacery of artificial foliage. The lighting varied its note from one end of the vast hall to the other, changing in tone from the cold, thin clarity of dawn, through high noon, to the hot glory of the western skies at sunset.

The seasons, too, were represented in their wide diversity. At the end where a platform was raised for dancing was the note of spring; then, at its heels, came summer, fall, and winter. It created a distinct illusion even in the city which is the stronghold of disillusionment. It furthermore maintained its illusion in each beholder for several minutes. This was triumph.

Marcia took her brother firmly by the arm. She was in time to prevent his sinking into an inviting chair. She led him from the box and started threading her way along the rows of the various exhibits.

"If it's all the same to you, sis," suggested Wilbur as they passed beneath the brilliant shafts of high noon, "we'll buy this damned dog you're after as quick as we can and then beat it."

Marcia did not answer. Her eyes had caught sight of a figure farther up the aisle, leaning with immaculate carelessness against the trunk of an artificial tree. She identified its muscular perfection as Dick Robbins.

A swift flush came into her cheeks. She made no effort to suppress it. She was not even aware that it was there.

The unconscious tightening of the pressure of her hand upon his arm caused Wilbur to look down. He caught the flush and studied the direction of her gaze.

"So it's swine," he announced with the calculated precision of drunkenness, "and not dogs that brought you here."

For a full second his implication failed to strike Marcia. Then she jerked her hand from his arm. Her eyes widened into amazed defiance.

"I realized that you were drunk," she said in a low voice that equaled his own, "but that remark is the sort of thing one is only led to expect from a sot."

"It was justified."

"All unpardonable things are—in the eyes of their progenitors."

"I've told you he's the type of swine no decent girl should have anything to do with. If I choose to know him, that's a different affair. A man can take care of himself with men. You came here expressly to meet him."

"I came here to buy a dog."

Wilbur laughed.

"You think I'm a liar?"

"I do."

Even their lips were white.

"Come with me."

She replaced her hand upon his arm. With studied artifice she smiled at some passing friends and wished them casual greetings. She approached a uniformed attendant.

"Where is the exhibition of Michael Lebombard, please?" she asked.

"Down that there aisle to the left, miss—that little cabin sort of deep in the shadow."

"Thank you."

Her black satin slippers with their rhinestone buckles sank into the thick carpet of pine needles. Her pressure upon her brother's arm amounted to a grip. There was sufficient truth in his assertion to make it infinitely more unendurable than if there had been all truth or none.

She had tried to persuade herself that her real reason for coming was the purchase

of a dog; that the fact of Robbins being there was merely incidental. It furthermore pinned her attitude, her relationship with Robbins, upon a finite plane. She would have preferred it to remain evasive—as chimerical as the rush of warm feeling that spread within her at the sight of him.

Their path led them toward the lighting effects of dawn. They reached the imperceptibly graded line that was the demarcation from the glare of the stronger arcs concealed by the foliage of the trees. They were approaching the illusion of winter. The pine needles at their feet were tufted with cotton snow. It seemed as if the air grew cooler.

There were few people. The crush was at the farther end of the great hall—spattering with the brilliant confusion of their garments the soft flames of spring—dancing in kaleidoscopic fragments to a stringed orchestra whose music was muted by the intervening spaces to an echo.

A bitterness hard and brittle as the painted snow came over Marcia. She stopped their determined advance and faced her brother. They were alone in the twilight of a winter dawn; alone beneath the artificial majesty of great trees; a bare yard or so from the log cabin that contained the exhibit of Michael Lebombard. She focused the attention of his eyes with her stare.

"And Susie?" she said.

He flinched as if from a physical blow. She pursued her advantage remorselessly.

"If I give up Dickie Robbins will you give up your Susie?"

They stared hard into each other's eyes; the offspring of a strong race. Degenerated both, as to their outward surface, from the virile strength and hardihood of their ancestors; subtled and refined to the luster of fine silver; faultlessly exquisite; their strong impulses of life and vigor kept in stern leash within.

They stared, searching each to plumb the soul of the other, while masking their own with a defensive veil. They saw nothing. She waited for him to speak. It was impossible, she felt, for his face to become any whiter. She shrugged. She did not laugh.

"The dog I came to buy," she said, "is in here."

CHAPTER II.

BEYOND PRICE.

MICHAEL LEBOMBARD sat within his log cabin in a New York carpenter's conception of a rustic chair. The carpenter had prided himself upon the chair. It was a confection; a confection of lathe-turned branches grading to ones so slender that they might be twigs.

It was a beautifully finished piece of artistry. There was subtlety in its curves—rusticity—an air of wildness, of the woods. And an illimitable sophistication.

To Michael Lebombard the chair was an abomination. But there was no other, and he was sixty-two years old and did not care either to stand or to sit upon the floor. Not only the chair but every attendant circumstance of his present situation was an abomination. He had been a fool to come.

From the moment when his foot had touched the steps of the train at the bandbox station of Ste. Marie de Beausire in his beloved Saskatchewan, he had begun to regret. There had been no cause for his regret—then. It had been based solely upon the indecisive foundations of intuition.

He stretched his thin, emaciated-looking arms that were in reality of the temper of a fine steel spring, and yawned, exposing a row of strong yellow teeth beneath the scraggly luxuriance of untrained mustaches. His black button eyes vanished behind a discontented squint. Even as he had but recently drawn the calico curtains across the windows of the cabin in order to shut out the obnoxious view of the artificial forest, he now lowered the lids of his eyes completely, that they might mask the shams of the cabin itself.

He felt nervous and ill at ease. It was not entirely due to the mad surging of the vast, strange city, but to something that lay beneath; something that he could not as yet define.

The door to the cabin opened and from below the heavy thatch of his eyebrows he

surveyed the figure of the young man who stood with such a nervous intensity upon its threshold.

"Michael Lebombard?" said Wilbur.

Michael arose from his chair.

"*Oui, m'sieu'.*"

Wilbur stood aside and Marcia came in. Her eyes were hot and brilliant as southern stars. Her color was high. She did not breathe evenly.

"You have shepherd dogs?" she said.

Lebombard looked his fill at the pair confronting him. They were a type that he was well familiar with in his character of guide in the great northern woods. But there they had always been transplanted. He saw them now for the first time in their own environment. He sensed their breeding, their wealth, and their great strain; a strain curiously allied with the one he was himself undergoing.

"*Mademoiselle*, she desires to see my dogs?"

Marcia looked steadily at her brother.

"It is the sole reason why I am here to-night," she said.

Three things Michael Lebombard at once decided. One was that the exquisite young girl with her unnatural coloring and startling eyes lied. The second was that the young man with the intense, drawn expression upon his weakly handsome face was drunk. The third was that each was standing upon the perilous brink of some emotional crisis in their lives.

One cannot arrive at the age of sixty-two without having acquired a deep sympathy or a vast intolerance for the tragedies of youth. And there was no intolerance in Lebombard's heart. In the depths of his great north woods he had drunk deeply from the well of philosophy that offers refreshing solace to the souls of solitary men. He had plumbed the depths of many human frailties and, to a measure, had come to understand their cure.

"If *mademoiselle*," he said, "will come this way?"

He crossed to a second door that was in the rear of the log cabin and placed his hand upon the latch. From behind it came two low, short barks. One sensed the presence of a smile beneath Michael's scrag-

gly, large mustaches; a smile of pride and deep pleasure.

"Vidinette," he said, "and Jacques." He offered the two names as an identity to the barks. The smile beneath his great mustaches deepened and showed faint creases beyond their shadowing edge as he added, with an air of pronouncing something tremendously important: "North Star—he does not bark."

The blood raced through Marcia like white fire. Would this tedious old fool, she wondered, never be done. Her thoughts were in a turmoil that was vague beyond endurance. Her anger raged to a point where it threatened to burst beyond the controls of breeding.

Her nails bit deeply into the palms of her hands as she watched the intolerable slowness of Lebombard's movements. It would seem that the raising of the latch was a ceremony; one of high state. She had small patience at the moment with showmanship. At last it was done. The latch was free of its hasp.

Michael Lebombard drew the door inwards with a flourish of his free arm and, so it seemed, of his whole body. He faced, for an instant, the pale obscurity that lay outside.

"*Attention!*" he said.

Then he bowed.

Marcia gave an impatient nod to Wilbur. They passed outside. An inclosure had been built that extended to a wall about eight feet in height. Beyond, at some distance, was a painted drop of timbered hills swathed in snow.

Standing erect against the background of the wall, motionless as carved statues, evenly balanced on all four feet, ears and head up, were two magnificent specimens of the shepherd dog, frequently, but carelessly, termed the police dog. They were about eight months old; the one a male, reddish brown in color; the other a female, white with brindle patches. They were twin objects of infinite beauty and great pride.

"Vidinette," said Lebombard softly, "and Jacques."

Marcia looked fixedly in their direction. Her eyes registered the fact that they were

there. Her brain was tormented by increasing pains. That they were thoroughbreds, she knew. The write-up in the newspapers had assured her of that; also that one possessed a peculiar excellence. The paper had said something about there being three.

It was characteristic of her that even in her distraught state there was an insistent urge to obtain the best. It would seem that one was already gone. Her mind darted swiftly along adjacent channels. If one were gone he would be the best. She wanted the best for herself. She must find out who had bought him and then offer his new owner a higher price. It could be arranged.

The paper had definitely mentioned the important dog's name. It was a curious name. That of a star. She had heard it once before that evening—from the lips of Lebombard himself—but a moment before—the North Star.

"Where," she said, "is the third?"

A positive glow swept across the wrinkles of Michael's face.

"*Mademoiselle* is not satisfied with Vidi-
nette? With Jacques?"

"I want the best."

"They are ver' perfect of their kind?"

"There are degrees even in perfection."

"*Mademoiselle*, I think can understand. She will see North Star."

The name came from Lebombard's hidden lips with the qualities reserved for veneration.

"Then he isn't sold?"

"Sold, *mademoiselle*!" A glint of fire pierced the reserves of Michael's black button eyes. "*Non, mademoiselle*, North Star he is not sold. One does not dispose so cavalierly of royalty."

Impatience increased within Marcia in hot, stifling waves. She wanted to hit something—her brother—that deadly old man—anything. Her stifled feelings demanded the relief of physical expression. She was on the point of making an offer for the dog unseen.

Their value, she knew, ran to many thousands. Were North Star, the perfect specimen he had been reputed to be, twenty, thirty thousand would not be too much.

She imagined she could easily get him for fifteen or ten. She would start at five. Perhaps it would not be necessary further to increase the offer.

"If *mademoiselle* and—?"

"My brother."

"And her brother will be good enough to stand a little this way?"

Marcia swerved sharply to the immediate present. She replaced her hand on Wilbur's arm and drew him a little to one side. He had almost fallen asleep, she noted, upon his feet. The traces of whatever emotions their recent altercation had aroused seemed gone.

His face was smooth and unruffled as a sleeping child's. He would look like a child, she thought, if it weren't for the bags that were beginning to form beneath his eyes. He must be very drunk.

Why did that old fool want them to stand aside? Would he materialize his wretched North Star from the air? She was in no mood for stunts.

"And now," said Lebombard, "*mademoiselle* shall see."

He joined them at the edge of the inclosure and fixed his eyes upon the rim of the eight foot wall. Thinly, like an echo vaguely heard, came the strains of the distant orchestra and a faint chatter of a lot of people. But the illusion of solitude remained. They seemed alone, the three of them and the two motionless dogs, acting some esoteric drama in the painted scene of snow and of the great north woods.

For an instant its spell caught even Marcia in its grip. Gently from above fell a few white flakes. It was several seconds before she realized that they probably were made of paper. But during those few seconds she found her mind, her eyes, her thoughts pinned with an unshakable intensity upon the lean, tense figure of Michael Lebombard. His eyes burned the edge of the high wall's rim. His voice, when he spoke, contained the tremor of command, and somehow of an abiding love.

"North Star!"

A flash of muscular gray poised on the wall and jumped to rest at their feet. For an instant everything was swept from Marcia's mind but the picture that the dog

presented. His head was rather lean, clean-cut, and medium wide between the ears; his forehead a bit arched; his skull sloping and continuing to a long, pointed muzzle. His jaws were strong and overlapping.

There was a lively, intelligent expression in his dark oval eyes. His ears were of medium size and pointed. They stood erect and turned to the front. The neck was strong, with well-developed muscles. The chest deep, but not very broad.

The ribs were flat and the stomach held well up. The back was flat and strong. The shoulders were long and sloping, and the legs straight. The feet, sunk lightly in the carpet of pine needles, were short and round in shape.

Old Lebombard, with an expressive gesture of his lean, strong hands, again repeated the name: "North Star."

Something was happening to Wilbur's eyes. Thin glazes seemed to be lifting from them. He stared steadily at the dog. They lost their vagueness and a definite expression settled in its place; an expression that changed as the second passed from curiosity into one almost of awe.

"God," he said quietly, "you wonder!"

At the sound of his voice, low and nervously pitched, a shock seemed to flash through North Star. His head turned until his eyes were in line with Wilbur's. Between the man and the beast shot certain definite lines of communication as finite as concrete things, lines that no eye can ever see, lines that no brain can ever comprehend, were they to try until the end of time.

They registered their presageful message in hammer blows upon Michael Lebombard's heart. Marcia saw nothing but a satisfactory specimen, a most satisfactory specimen, of the type of dog she expressly desired to buy.

"He'll do," she said abruptly. "I'll give you five thousand for him."

The old man looked not so much at her as beyond her. It was as if her body offered a glass through which he saw some private images of his own. His voice was harsh and grating as the ice that breaks in springtime.

"Five thousan' what, *mademoiselle*?"

"Dollars, of course."

"Dollars, *mademoiselle*?"

Michael Lebombard did not change the peculiar evasiveness of his gaze, but his eyes grew hard as glazed coal. He shook his head.

"Ten thousand."

"It is not the amoun', *mademoiselle*—a single one would do as well as many. It is the medium of barter."

She tried to return his look impatiently, but it evaded her.

"Barter? You mean you want something in exchange?"

The flood of pent words burst forth in a torrent.

"*Sacré nom de Dieu, mademoiselle*, I wan' nothing in exchange. North Star, he is not for sale. Vidinette and Jacques, if *mademoiselle* she desires, then yes. But for North Star, not twenty times ten thousan' dollars could him buy. If *mademoiselle* had said five thousan' smiles—five thousan' tears—five thousan' thoughts of misery, of happiness, of love—"

"But you came down to sell your dogs? The papers said so."

"*Mademoiselle*, I cannot sell North Star! One cannot sell a king!"

"But I want North Star."

"It is not a question of who wants North Star, *mademoiselle*. It is a question of who North Star wants himself."

"I don't understand you at all."

"If *mademoiselle* will have a little patience, perhaps I can explain."

Marcia was only too sure that she would have no patience at all. There was none left within her. But she wanted North Star. Furthermore, she knew men. If she were ever to get the dog she must contain herself until this tiresome old man had finished his maunderings.

Then she would offer fifteen thousand dollars. She would write a check on the spot. If necessary, she would add one smile, at an extremity, one tear. The tear, in her present condition, would be easy.

That it would be a tear of rage would be of no matter. The old idiot could interpret it as he liked. She suppressed a heartfelt curse against foibles.

"I have patience," she said.

Lebombard did not shift his gaze. He

quietly said, "Down!" The three dogs sank to the ground at rest. A misty look came into the old man's eyes; a mist that effaced the girl standing before him; the painted scene of snow that was behind her; the great trunks of the artificial trees; effaced them all as if they were non-existent, as if the removal of their mockery had given him clear vision with which his sight could travel beyond two thousand miles—to the north and to the west, where the solitary cabin maintained its lonely state in the small clearing in the great pine woods.

Where there was no sound within or without. With its heavy wooden shutters closed and fastened tight. Its door barred, until his hand should see fit to open it again. Where it squatted in lumpy insignificance at the base of a proud, tall tree and cast its minute shadow on the ground beneath the clear unsullied brilliance of the pale indifferent moon.

CHAPTER III.

ABIDING FLAME.

"FOR eight months, *mademoiselle*, have I watched North Star from his birth. There were five in the litter. Now the mother and two of the puppies they are dead. One could see that the three who were left would be masters of their kind. But that was a surety! And of the three, one I believed in my heart would be a king of beasts.

"Men say one cannot judge a puppy. That five—six—seven months must pass before one can be of a certainty. But I, Michael Lebombard, I know! I look—I tell—and how? Because it is into the eyes that I look, *mademoiselle*—into the small, clear mirrors of the soul. Into the eyes of my three puppies I look. In none do I find wickedness, or sleepiness, or fear.

"*Bon!* So far is each of a perfection. Two more months they pass. I look again. Still are the eyes a recompense to my diligence, my love, my care. But this time what do I see? In the eyes of one, in addition to goodness, to alertness, to great courage, there is something else. *Mademoiselle* can guess, is it not so, what it is?"

Marcia quietly shook her head. She would have liked to have shaken it with energetic impatience. But she knew that so to do would only further controvert her purpose. It was Wilbur who answered Lebombard's question.

"You found nobility," he said.

Again, as Wilbur spoke, a tremor seemed to run over North Star. He turned his dark oval eyes upon the youngster and held them fixed there.

"*M'sieu'* has discrimination. How did he know?"

"You couldn't miss it."

"It is there, as *m'sieu'* say, and will be there until death. In this pup's eyes I see it and then I knew the *Bon Dieu* he had granted me the happiness of owning a dog who would be great even among the great.

"I sought a name for that dog. One must be had at once, that he might know, like humans, that he was an established being in the order of society. But that was a problem, *m'sieu'*! No earthly name, it seem, would suffice. For what name bestowed upon temporal rank could do honor to the nobility and high purpose of this beast? Not king, *m'sieu'*—nor officers of government or state.

"I took my problem to the kin' face of the night and found my answer in the stars. In the north it hung like an eternal flame—a fire of beauty and, *m'sieu'*, of service—service to adventurers, to *braves* who face the unknown spaces of the lan' and sea—a guide—a help—a promise—the North Star. That and that alone should be a worthy namesake for my dog."

The cloudiness had completely passed from Wilbur's eyes. He returned the dog's regard with one as clear, as searching as his own. He nodded his head absently to Lebombard in agreement.

He could not understand the strange impulse that was coming over him. It was as definite as if it had been the result of something physical. An attraction—a magnetism—a feeling almost of embarrassment, as if veils had been snatched aside from a whole vista of reserves, and in the mutual look that passed between himself and the dog there existed a positive understanding.

The finely developed sensibilities of his nature shrank from what they imagined to be the publicity of it. They begged a mask—some shifting of his gaze. He could not do so.

"They then, *m'sieu'*, became my children—Vidinet, *mon* Jacques, and North Star. You will think my fancy it is strange, but you mus' remember I am a ver' old man who lives alone and listens to the beating of his heart for human company in the deep of the great north woods. I grow to love my dogs. They are a daughter an' two sons.

"I fin' I begin to plan for them. The fancy it is take hol' upon my mind and all winter it is stronger and more strong. If I had a daughter—if I had two sons—what, I ask myself, would I do to give them the best advantages there are in life?

"One cannot give much in the woods, *m'sieu'*. They are not for the young. They are for the ol' and weary—a resting place for souls that have been bruised by the great world—a sanctuary for declining years when one would get close to that nature into whose bosom he mus' soon return.

"My daughter, I said, I would send her away to some fine finishing school where she could mingle an' show herself an' be proud among her kind. I would miss her, but I, Michael Lebombard, am not a man to stan' in a woman's way.

"My two sons, ah, with them it seems I could not part! They were the strength, the comfort for my wearying soul. One, perhaps, I could give up—launch him among his equals, there to hol' his head high, to win of the honors, fame, the adoration of admirers, to live in all the pomp an' circumstances of champions. It was not my right to withhol' him from his fate.

"Perhaps, *m'sieu'*, some day he would come back. Perhaps he would think a little now and then of his ol' daddy Michael Lebombard, of his home, his forest, and his north. But one son should remain. Surely that was not too much to ask?

"I choose my son—but you can guess!—North Star. Even so I am not the hard-hearted father. *Non, non!* North Star, I

say, shall nevaire be sol'. Nor shall he ever be boun'—even to me. He is free. Free as the great forest of his birth—as the air—the sky—as all great beautiful things are free.

"With his daddy, he shall always have a home. But there shall be no chains. I think, *m'sieu'*, you can understan' what I mean by that."

"You mean he is free to leave even you, if he wants to."

"It is true, *m'sieu'*. When the day come that my son North Star he make up his mind to leave his ol' daddy, Michael Lebombard, he shall go! I shall say of the price nothing. I shall say but this to the man he choose as his master—*nevair sell North Star*. Even as he go to that man from me, so shall he go, if he desire, to other men.

"He, too, *m'sieu'*, would seek perfection in companionship—that ultimate aim which move us all mos' strongly in this life. Not for love, *m'sieu'*, or passion—but frien'ship which is based upon a rock of mutual respect and understanding.

"An' that is why, *mademoiselle*, I will not sell to you North Star. I mus' thank you for your patience. Again I tell you, *mon* Jacques, Vidinet, yes if you will. You are rich, you are of the well bred, you will give to my son or my daughter a proper home and the advantages that are due to their breeding. What shall we say?"

A hundred answers whirled in Marcia's splitting head. One thing was certain: the old idiot would not sell North Star. Her obstinacy was great enough to make her want that dog or none. They had wasted a half hour—an hour—in being tantalized. Bored and tantalized. It was insufferable.

"Thank you," she said, "very much. Good-by."

"Adieu, *mademoiselle*."

She reëntered the cabin, crossed its narrow confine, and went out by the front door. She had taken several steps along the artificial woodland path before she realized that Wilbur was not with her. She turned impatiently and looked for him.

The whole dog question was erased from her mind. In its place pressed a flood of

immediate memories. Their altercation—Dickie Robbins—would he still be waiting against the tree—could she, as she would now have to, get rid of Wilbur—as to Susie should she wait, or take this opportunity for losing herself in the near-by crowd? Wilbur was drunk; it wouldn't be sporting to leave him. He was a fool, unkind, and a drunkard—a wastrel—but her brother—her— Ah, he was coming.

She looked at him coldly as he came toward her along the path. He appeared quite sober. He was also more than a little pale. She wondered whether they would plunge at once again into the heat of their fight.

"Did you try to argue him into taking more for him?" she asked when Wilbur had joined her.

"Certainly not," he replied shortly.

"Then what was it that delayed you back there?"

"I doubt whether you would understand. I don't quite myself."

"I'm ready for your apology."

"Apology?"

"You called me a liar."

"I'm sorry. Let's not bicker, sis. Let's go home. I feel rotten."

"Sick?"

"No. Morally."

They had reached the fringe of the crowd and were pressing through it. It was clustering about the end of an artificial trout stream where an angler was making a series of brilliant casts with flies. For a moment they could not advance.

Along the trail they had left there was a commotion. A gray form of splendid beauty that drew expressions of admiration from all whom it passed. A gray form that sped unerringly upon the scent that drew him as surely as a magnet will draw steel, ignoring in his passage the pelts, the smells, the potpourri of woodland exhibits that at another moment would have proved of such compelling interest; unmindful of hands that attempted to stroke him, of voices that made an effort to arrest his attention, unmindful of everything but an overwhelming urge to find at once the young stranger who had taken, without reason or question, his heart.

Something cool pressed against the palm of Wilbur's hand. He turned and looked down upon North Star.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIAMOND BRACELET.

TO Marcia, the dog's appearance at her brother's heels was the final straw that upset her irritability. It meant further delay. There had been too much delay. Another minute in that atmosphere of unrest would send her, she felt into hysterics or an outrageous exhibition of temper—a public exhibition.

But did it mean delay so much as it meant escape? The word sprang appealingly before her, much as an oasis in the midst of an insufferable desert. Wilbur was sober now. How or why she did not care. He was thoroughly competent again to take care of himself. She would send him back with the dog. Then she could slip into the crowd.

She remembered the general location of the tree against which she had caught sight of Dickie Robbins leaning. She would find him again and join him. He was misunderstood. Even as she was misunderstood.

"Take him back," she said.

Wilbur did not answer her. He did not move, but continued to rest his hand firmly upon the dog's strong neck. The dark oval eyes stared unwaveringly up into his.

"I said take him back. I'll wait—rather, I'll be somewhere around here. That French fool is standing in the doorway of his cabin. I caught a glimpse of him through the crowd. He's waiting for you to take the dog back."

"No, he isn't," said Wilbur.

"Look for yourself and see."

"I know he's standing there; but he isn't waiting for me to take back North Star."

Marcia permitted herself a distinct tapping of her foot.

"I'll take the dog back myself," she said.

"You can't."

"Have you gone mad?"

"He wouldn't go with you."

Marcia suppressed the luxury of a scream. She postponed it. She shaped her lips and gave a sharp whistle.

"North Star," she said, "come!"

The dog did not move; no muscle of him moved. His eyes remained fixed upon Wilbur's. In them he seemed to read a question.

"You'll only make a show of yourself," declared Wilbur.

Marcia stared coldly at the few neighboring people in whom her whistle had aroused a more or less intensive interest. She grasped that they were classing her among the exhibits. Several even moved in her direction as though to encircle her to view her act—a dog act.

The thought seemed tremendously humorous, and she began to laugh. She moved rapidly away. She found herself walking swiftly back along the path and toward the figure of Michael Lebombard standing in the open doorway of his cabin.

"Go up to my brother and get your dog," she said fiercely when she came up to him. "As you may or may not have realized, my brother has had too much to drink. He is perfectly liable to walk out and have the dog follow him. He isn't, and I won't be, responsible for his actions."

"Perhaps not, *mademoiselle*," said Lebombard; and his voice was that of an old man, of a very old man, who has just realized the truth that the fabric of all human emotion is no more tenuous than the stuff of dreams; "but North Star, my son, he will. You need not to worry any more about your brother. No harm will come to him now."

"I'm not worrying in the slightest about my brother. I stopped worrying about my brother about five years ago. I'm worrying about your dog."

"*Mademoiselle* she mean her brother's dog."

A curse, a bitter, good, strong, honest curse upon conundrums shouted Marcia's nerves. What Wilbur had done, she decided, inasmuch as her ragged edges would permit her to decide anything, was to buy the dog while he had lingered in the cabin.

"How much did he pay you?"

Old Lebombard's face did not change the alignment of a single wrinkle; but it grew pale.

"Nothing, *mademoiselle*."

"He paid you nothing, and yet you don't object to the dog walking out of this building with him? A dog worth thousands of dollars?"

She wanted to shake him.

"*Mademoiselle* need feel nothing of concern. It is a private matter between North Star, *mademoiselle's* brother, and me, Michael Lebombard. I have but one little request to make. Your brother's name, *mademoiselle*, and the address of where he live."

The cat at last had popped from the bag, felt Marcia.

"I see," she said. "You'll send the bill around in the morning." And there was no doubt in her mind but that it would be a stunner.

"*Mademoiselle!*" Marcia wondered at the burning glints that had sprung into his black button eyes. "There will be no bill. For the last time I tell you I take no money for North Star. I ask for the name—the address—so that I may know where it is his home. So that perhaps some day, if the brother of *mademoiselle* he is so kin', some day when I am more lonely than on other days, I may be permitted to come and see my North Star again. I should like to do so just once before I die."

"I really believe you are serious."

"Serious, *mademoiselle!* What bring you to this place? Why you come—why I come—why?"

She refused to retreat before the fierceness in his look and in his voice. She stared back at him sharply. There was something uncanny about the creature. Weird. What had he meant by his question? Recluses, she had been led to believe, possessed a certain power of divination, of second-sight.

"I will tell you what it is bring you to this place, *mademoiselle*—the thing that bring you and your brother and me and North Star." Michael Lebombard's voice held the chill sternness of one of his own great northern winds. "It is fate."

She expelled a pent breath of relief.

There was such comforting refuge in the abstract. For a terrifying instant she had firmly believed that he was about to say Dickie Robbins. With a thoughtful frown she unclasped the diamond bracelet from her wrist. It was worth eighteen thousand dollars.

"Here," she said, "take this. Our name is Gale—Wilbur and Marcia Gale. We live on Fifth Avenue. You'll find us in the register."

Her last impression of the old fool was the glittering pin-points in his eyes. They rivaled the brilliants that lay unheeded in his hand.

Lebombard did not move until he had seen her join her brother—until he had seen her brother, herself, and North Star start breaking a way through the crowd. The brother turned and looked back.

Michael bowed. From North Star there had been no sign. It was so, Lebombard thought as he went inside the cabin and closed and bolted its door, that one felt at a death. In his heart there was no anger or lack of understanding at the going of North Star. There was nothing there at all. It had been drained of all feeling as if by a great pump.

It was not that North Star loved him less or the other more. It was because North Star held an equal affection for both. And Michael Lebombard knew what had tipped the balance of the scales. It was service.

North Star knew—knew that he was needed—that this new, suddenly beloved stranger who had come into his life needed him, his protection, his love, his care. That old daddy Lebombard should need protection or care was a something at which to laugh. Michael had been a dispenser of those very commodities ever since North Star had been born.

How could North Star know that though he did not need them at all, he wanted them so very, very much? He did not even consider the luxury of tears. He had never cried in all his life. He was ignorant of their rich solace.

But one relief Michael Lebombard did permit himself. He took the diamond bracelet in his thin strong hands and rent

it link from link. Then, later, he sealed it in a package and mailed it to Marcia. That would convince her, of a certainty, that there had been no sale.

CHAPTER V.

THE MASKING COLUMN.

MARCIA did not come near enough to Dickie Robbins on the way out with her brother and North Star to speak to him. They were by the elevators when she saw him. He was standing at the farther side of the broad foyer by a column. Hot waves of resentment went through her as she remembered the wording of her brother's criticism. Swine. She could have cried as the word disseminated its poison within her—or killed. Robbins, she could see, was talking with some one who was standing behind the column.

She watched the impassive strength of his face. She had heard it called animalistic and sensual. She seized the fictitious comfort that such was the hackneyed term bestowed upon most muscular men by some weaklings and by all disappointed women. She felt the blood surge warmly to her cheeks as she remembered the pressure of his hand the last time they had met. There had been meditation in the pressure, and reserve—a reserve that had hinted at crushing strengths that had been held in leash, somehow, by the mastery of her eyes. She rather wished he would not use perfume.

Who was he talking with? She would see him again at the Petersens' dance Thursday. She would explain about tonight; her brother, the dog, her own splitting head. And she would feel again the meditated pressure of his hand—a reserve only too clearly unmasked by the sultry passions in his eyes. He was strong. He was a man, not an angel.

She was proudly glad that he was not an angel. In the secret fastness of her heart lay the intent to make him one herself. What if he did use scents? Lots of men used them—prize fighters did. What was his family? No one knew. And she didn't care. There were no class lines on earth

that mattered to people who desired to know one another—who spoke the intuitive language of personality, of magnetic attraction, rather than of heredity. Who was he talking with?

"Step aboard, sis."

She faced her brother and the opened doors of the elevator. A definite sensation of ice chilled her heart as the doors were closing and the car began its swift descent. Robbins's companion had moved from behind the masking column—a woman in a metal dress; a woman with white skin and startling lips; a woman whose hair was flame; a woman of thirty-five.

"You're standing on North Star's paw, sis."

She turned on Wilbur in a blaze.

"Then why doesn't he bark and tell me—bite me!"

"I guess it's because you're my sister, sis."

The car came to a stop and the doors slid open upon the blare and clangor of the New York night. The three faced it; two with their bitterly defined problems of the present and the past; one with the enigma of the future.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLOW.

THE three events that were to disrupt North Star's life and leave their imprint upon his future, had their beginning in the library of the house on Fifth Avenue. A cold snap had shaken itself from the vanishing train of winter and the city had lost its air of spring.

Within the library, before a welcome log fire, there was quiet and warmth. Everything was as it should be. Wilbur sat in a deep armchair, reading. Marcia was above in her own living room. The servants were busied with the orderly routine of their duties. The house was an impregnable fortress of security. It was mid-afternoon and the westering sun blazed in through the windows. It was a moment of hush, of peace. But North Star was not at peace.

His head, outstretched upon his paws,

was still. His whole body was still. The warmth from the fire was pleasant. But he felt uneasy. A vague disquiet disturbed him. It disturbed him the more because he could not define its source. Nor could he locate it. There was no sound beyond the occasional rustle of a turning page. There was no scent that warned of danger. There was no antagonistic object that he could see.

But he was uneasy. Once before he had had the same sensation. It had been in his great north woods. The feeling had grown stronger and stronger, just as it was increasing within him now. For some reason, the explanation of which he never knew, he had suddenly leaped against the chest of his old daddy Michael Lebombard and had hurled him, with his great strength, backward for a distance of about fifteen feet. And a huge limb, weakened by storm, had crashed to earth from the tree beneath which they had been standing.

He got quietly up and made an inspection of the house. He toured it from top floor to cellar. Still there was no sound, no scent, no thing of danger that his eyes could see. He returned to the library and stretched himself again before the fire. He tried to sleep. He could not. For half an hour he lay still.

And then he heard a bell ring. It was a sound too faint to be heard by Wilbur, but his own sharp sensibilities had easily caught it. It was the sound associated in his mind with a subsequent opening of the front door. He heard the measured tread of Wilkinson, the butler, moving along the hall. He caught his scent. He heard the opening of the inner door; the storm door; the closing of each. The feeling of uneasiness within him leaped to its peak. A low growl rumbled in his throat.

Wilbur looked up from his book and shot a curious glance at North Star. The dog was tense. He looked around the library. It was empty. Its doors, its windows were closed. The dog's eyes were fastened upon the door that led to the hallway. It opened and Wilkinson came in.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," he said. "Mr. Richard Robbins."

Wilbur's volatile nature flared into in-

stant anger. He had made it distinctly plain to Robbins and to his whole crowd that the life he led with them was one that was emphatically dissociated from the home. He had left no doubts in their minds about his home being primarily his sister's, or of his firm intention of guarding her from contact with that side of life which he believed the normal heritage of men.

But he knew Robbins. He was indifferent alike to hints or to plain language if they contravened his end. His ignoring of any direct insult amounted to an art. There would be no good in sending him away; in refusing to see him. He would expect that, and be prepared. Furthermore, there would be some explicit purpose behind the visit; an unpleasant one. It would be better to know.

"Show him in."

Wilkinson left the library. Wilbur got up from his chair and took a stand before the fire place. He glanced down at the growling dog.

"Quiet, old fellow."

There was no further sound.

Robbins came in from the hallway. He drew the door shut behind him. He said nothing. He did not smile. He stood still for a moment and observed the details of the room. His glance seemed pertinently appraising—the high, oak beamed ceiling with its panels of dull gold, the inset cases filled with books, the Velasquez, two Corots, a Vermeer, and four family portraits by Stuart upon the walls, the Samarkand rugs that made soft islands on the dark waxed floor, the great fireplace of chiseled stone. Then he nodded to Wilbur.

"Got something to tell you," he announced. "Couldn't say it over the phone."

He sat down in the chair where Wilbur had been reading. He held one muscular hand tight in the grip of the other. His eyes were hard and shiny.

"I told you never to come here," said Wilbur.

"Had to. It's about the party night before last at Connor's. You were pretty tanked."

"I remember exactly what happened."

"Sure?"

"Certainly."

"In detail?"

"What are you driving at?"

"It's important. You saw the fight between West and Connor, didn't you?"

"I was in that small smoking room of Connor's at the time it started. They were rowing over one of the girls."

"Just the three of you there alone, weren't there? You and Connor and West?"

"Yes."

"And the door closed?"

"Yes."

"Any one come in during the scrap?"

"No one."

"You saw West hit Connor?"

"Certainly I did. One on the chin and two just over the heart. I was sober enough to miss nothing."

"Try to stop it?"

"Didn't have time. It was over in a flash. Just the three blows and then Connor passed out on the floor."

"Leave him there?"

"We put him on a lounge to sleep it off."

"He never woke up."

"Still in a hop?"

"He's dead."

The color drained from Wilbur's cheeks.

"Good God!"

"Connor is dead and West's skipped."

"He killed him?"

"A blow over the heart killed him."

"But West struck it—"

"So you say."

"What in hell are you driving at?"

"Keep your shirt on. Of course, I believe what you tell me is true. Others mightn't."

Wilbur seemed to shrink within himself.

"I see what you mean," he said.

"Glad you do. You've been looking at me as if I were a crook ever since I came in. Takes trouble to show a man who his friends are. Don't see any of the rest of the boys around, do you? You bet you don't. They're busy saying things."

"Saying things?"

"Yes. To the police."

The word was the last blow that overthrew Wilbur's hold upon himself. His nervous system was well shot from the pace he had been leading. He tried to stop his

hands from trembling. He put them in his pockets.

"And West's skipped?"

"Yep."

"But surely that points conclusive suspicion against him?"

"Maybe so. Maybe they 'll figure out he skipped rather than testify against a friend. They'd shove you in a cooler at any rate until they found West."

"Maybe they'd never find him—"

"He's slick."

"And I could never prove I didn't kill Connor."

"That's the dope." Robbins got up from his chair and crossed over to Wilbur. He tapped him on the chest with a blunt finger. "Now, listen here: When I said the boys were talking it doesn't mean that they've been mentioning any names—yet. They had to cover themselves about West and the police are out after him now. But they're keeping it under cover that you were in the room, too. Get me?"

"Then there's nothing to worry about."

"The hell there isn't. Maybe the police won't get West for some time. The boys will begin to get uneasy. They 'll start mentioning other names. Yours. I'm going to give you a straight tip. West hit for Canada. Go after him. Get a confession from him before witnesses. Cover yourself. His jumping off place is Montreal. He's got twelve hours' start on you. Go get him. Look up a small hotel called the Royal. It's run by a man named Harris. Am I good enough to come to your house now, kid?"

"You're welcome to anything I have. But I'm damned if I'll stand for your knowing my sister. No matter what happens she's got to be kept out of this. And that means my name's got to be kept out of it."

"Wouldn't do any harm to let the boys know you'd be grateful for seeing you through. Grateful in a practical way. You know what they are. They wouldn't say no to a present. I could fix it for you if you say the word."

"Money?"

"Sure. You could leave me a check."

"I never knew they were as low as that."

"Lot you don't know, kid. It's never healthy to play with fire. Never has been and never will be. Some day there's a slip. Then you get burned."

"You're a brick to stand by me this way."

"I'm different."

"There's a train leaves around seven—"

"Take it."

Wilbur crossed to a desk and wrote a check.

"That be enough?" he said.

"Yep. I'll get busy right away."

Robbins extended his hand. Wilbur shook it.

"Keep your trail under your own hat, kid—even from me. I want to be able to say that I don't know where you are, if I have to, and mean it."

"Good-by—and thanks."

"Good luck, kid."

CHAPTER VII.

MADNESS.

THE note left by Wilbur did not surprise Marcia. The note had simply stated that he was going away on a trip. It was typical of his actions for the last five years. It just meant another bust. They lasted anywhere from two weeks to several months.

To inquiries from friends, she gave out that her brother had gone on a cruise about the West Indies. No, there was no definite itinerary. He would stay until his cold was better. They knew how hard the spring climate was for his throat. They smiled. Only too well they knew.

That much, she had always felt, was due Wilbur; her protection during his absence. She was neither blind nor a fool. But there was nothing she could do. She generalized the absences for her own satisfaction beneath the understandable term of wild oats.

Her own affairs were reaching a climax; a climax that had loomed more largely in particular during the last two weeks of Wilbur's absence. Robbins had begun to call with a frequency that approached regularity. He secured his entrée under the cloak of anxiety about her brother. She

willingly added herself beneath its folds. The source of his anxiety was only hinted at—things it would be better if she were not to understand.

She looked upon him as a deeply wronged man—wronged by her brother, who so evidently and unreasonably despised the hand that was offered to help him. She herself allayed Robbins's fears. Wilbur, she explained, never let himself in for any serious trouble. Robbins had smiled reflectively and said nothing. He would just stand by, he said, in case anything should break.

She had quieted North Star's objection to Robbins with a firm hand. The dog had come to recognize her as the second in command. He obeyed her as Wilbur had told him so to do. But she could not make him leave the drawing-room when Robbins was present. It was the one point on which he would not obey her. He would be quiet enough, lying either stretched at her feet or off in a corner, but he would be always there.

She knew the dog's presence made Robbins nervous, in spite of Robbins's attempt to establish friendly relations—attempts that were always significantly repulsed with a warning growl. She gave up her efforts to drive the dog away; she came to forget his presence.

It was at night that Robbins came mostly, either to escort her to some affair, when he would return with her after it was over, and linger a minute or two after saying good night, or else he would come and they would make an evening of it at home, talking. It flattered her to think that she was weaning him from the lurid trails he had been following, giving him a chance that he had never before so intimately had, bringing out the true wells of goodness that were waiting to be tapped beneath the crust of circumstance.

He was an interesting talker. But she knew that his words were mere surface play to mask his hidden fires. She wondered when he would permit them to escape from his control. And what she would do when he did so.

On the morning of the day that marked the close of the third week of Wilbur's ab-

sence she received a postal card addressed in his handwriting. It was a picture card showing a moose standing on a hilltop in silhouette against the sky. The postmark was smudged, making it undecipherable. The stamp was Canadian.

Written in the space reserved for a message was the single word, "Love." She never thought of showing it to Robbins. The fiction of anxiety concerning her brother had been dropped. She placed the card in a pigeonhole of her desk and forgot about it.

Robbins came that night. They were going nowhere. He came for dinner, and she led him afterward into the library, where they had coffee. She was wearing an evening gown of silver lace over a foundation of *vert Nil Patou* velvet. Light from a bracket of candles found reflection in a solitary blood ruby that hung from a slender chain around her throat.

Robbins was peculiarly silent, and she found herself doing most of the talking. His silence became, eventually, pointed. He was sitting in a chair drawn up near her.

She found herself looking at his hands. Their knuckles were white from the grip he held upon the arms of the chair. For an instant she felt a vague tremor of alarm; it reflected itself upon her face.

"I suppose you know," said Robbins.

He stood up and came over to her. He held out his hands. She placed her own in them. He drew her to her feet. She felt herself sinking with a mad swift plunge below the waters of a fathomless sea, drenched with an unspeakable sense of completion. The stiff bosom of his shirt pressed the ruby sharply into her skin. She was unaware of the pain.

He released her. She retained a confused impression that Robbins at once began a discussion about their wedding. There was some talk, she remembered, about giving the news out to reporters. It was understood that he would attend to everything. There was a second blinding moment near the door; then he was gone.

She sank upon her knees in the still hall and placed her arms around North Star. She thought nothing of his tenseness, of

his lack of any affectionate response. She went to bed. The sun had risen before she fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

HATE FLARES.

IT never occurred to North Star that he had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, but as the days drifted unchangingly into other days a dull pain increased within him until it became a gnawing strong as hunger. He lived in his remembrances. There would be two: one, an emotional panorama of the great north woods of his birth, the sun, the sky, the long cold northern nights, the freedom of the wilds, the watchfulness and training of old daddy Michael Lebombard; the other, Wilbur.

His attitude showed that he had come to understand if not to love Marcia, as if he would have liked to love her, representing, as she must have, to his comprehension the link that now connected him with Wilbur. But he sensed in her certain reserves and confusions that baffled him.

As to why his beloved master did not return, it was impossible for him to conceive any reason at all. He had never known absences before, nor death. Each day as the sun arose, so hope perhaps arose within him. But hope, from lack of nourishment, grows frail.

He could know nothing, of course, of the two postal cards that had come to Marcia, from different places in the great northwest, that had allayed her own misgivings concerning the movements of her brother. The spree, so far as she was concerned, was still on.

North Star had come to accept with resignation the frequent presence of Robbins in the house. There was still distrust and dislike, but it was carefully suppressed. As for Marcia, she had never given North Star much of her attention, and recently she had given him none at all. Her hours were continuous preparations for the wedding which was to take place within two weeks.

She had fought for delay. She had wanted her brother to be present at the wedding,

to prove to him how utterly mistaken he had been in his estimation of Robbins. But Robbins had overruled her even as he had overwhelmed her.

It was Robbins who suggested and arranged that North Star be shown at the bench show. In spite of his carefully restrained attitude, he already felt a proprietorship in Marcia's possessions. He was tasting the first sweet fruits of the reflection that his approaching marriage with a girl of such wealth had brought him.

He looked, through masked eyes, upon the great house on Fifth Avenue as partly his own. He contemplated certain changes. They revolved principally around the staff of servants. He had submerged his nervousness for North Star, and now regarded the dog as a means to further the advertisement of his own importance. He recognized the perfection of the animal's points. He would create a sensation at the bench show. And Robbins would share largely in the sensation. It was arranged.

The bench show took place at the Madison Square Garden. To North Star it was an ordeal of confusing misery. He could not comprehend its purpose. It meant nothing to him as a test of perfection. He simply did not grasp what it was all about.

There was discomfort. There was unrest; lights—crowds of curious people, either staring or gushing—noises—occasional contact and continual proximity with other dogs of his breed, who seemed to sense the drifting qualities of his life, the fact that he was rudderless upon strange waters with no guiding beacon of a master to explain or upon whom he could depend. And utterly purposeless. There was no answer to it at all.

Most bitter of all, there was Robbins—Robbins, who exercised a stern, distasteful officiousness that he was forced, through Marcia's unmistakable orders, to obey. But he did so without a heart—sometimes without comprehension, automatically with his body alone, while his thoughts retreated to the dimming fastnesses of his two great remembrances.

Robbins reveled in his rôle as exhibitor. Marcia had turned the matter over completely to him, although North Star was

entered under her brother's name. He had bought a book on the subject, and, for his own satisfaction, had checked up on North Star's points. He used the scale drawn up by the German Shepherd Dog Society, which valued the perfect specimen at one hundred points.

And in none had North Star fallen down. It was an assured fact that the dog would sweep the field. Firmly embedded in his mind was the *idée fixe* that when he placed North Star before the judge the paramount thing was to have the dog's ears erect and his head up. He rehearsed it many times.

To North Star the moment of judgment was but another incident in the long ordeal that had swiftly become a senseless nightmare, the chief horror of which was the officious and intolerable proximity of Robbins. The strain had wearied his body to desperation and there was no heart in him, no one near by whom he could love, no one to awaken to its best advantage his great pride, no one to warn him that he was to strive for competitive success.

He felt numb. He wanted to go away, back to the library in the house on the Avenue, back to the fading scents of the young master whom he loved. He wanted rest for his tired body; he wanted sleep; and he wanted a cessation of the jarring clash of scents, of lights, of crowds, and of the proximity of Robbins. But Robbins would give him none of these things.

He went with Robbins with a mechanical obedience before the judge. He saw without comprehending the things he saw. His surroundings were a grating cloud from which he drew deeper and ever deeper into his alleviating memories. He stood. He held his ears erect and his head up—for a while. At a sharp command from the hated voice he held them up again.

The rest of his body failed utterly to comply. He left it composed in the tired position of slight relaxation that was most soothing to his aching muscles. Robbins did not notice that the position turned the body a certain way, throwing out its joints. The critical eyes of the judge then saw faults which North Star in reality did not possess.

The moment passed. An hour passed—an hour that built up in unbearable amounts his great weariness of nerves, of body, and of soul. At last he was in the motor and knew that he was going home.

He sank at the feet of Marcia and Robbins, and gave himself up to the soothing relief of the car's smooth motion. His eyes, already sodden, closed to embrace sleep. A sharp, cracking pain on the side of his head flexed him to his feet with the force of a burst of fire. He stood trembling. Great surges of passion blinded his senses to everything but the withdrawn hand of Robbins which had been responsible for the unforgivable indignity, the sharp stab to his pride, of being struck. He had never been struck before.

The impulse to kill flared from the embers of his already present hate. A harsh sound swelled from his throat. He tensed for the spring. He heard Marcia scream. He heard her sharp, "Down, North Star! Down!" His passion, with great fingers, dragged him from the rock of obedience upon which had been built the whole fabric of his life. He wavered—hesitated.

"Down!" came again the command.

Trembling, sick, confused, he sank back upon his haunches.

"It was the just reward for failure," said Robbins in a voice that he strove to keep from trembling.

Marcia for a full moment said nothing. The color had returned to her cheeks. It continued to surge into them until they were flame. She stared steadily at Robbins, seeing him ever more clearly as scale after scale dropped its glass of illusion from her eyes.

"If you ever strike that dog again," she said, "if you ever touch that dog again, I'll kill you."

CHAPTER IX.

CAST OUT.

IT was on the head, elbows, and paws that North Star first began to feel an intense itching and irritation that prevented him from sleeping and began to destroy his appetite. As the disease attained

a firm foothold and started to spread, it began to work the complete demoralization of his nerves. It was his first acquaintance with disease.

It was at the bench show that he had become infected with the mange. He had contracted the less serious *sarcoptes* form which did not destroy the hair, but which, on the other hand, was less open to detection from observation. And there was no one interested enough to observe him, to recognize his plight, and see that he was given the most essential immediate attention. There was no one at all but Marcia and the servant who was detailed to feed him.

It was this man who first began to suspect that something was wrong. The dog had lost all interest in his food. He was irritable, morose. He looked thin. For a while the man paid no attention. If North Star didn't want to eat, that was his own business. The food was there if he wanted it.

The man had enough things on his mind without having to worry about a dog's appetite. Helga was one of them. Helga was a kitchen maid and was all-enveloping in the attention she demanded of his thoughts.

As for Marcia, her interests were centered exclusively upon herself. She was at sea. She wished that Wilbur were at home to force her to take the step she secretly desired—to break off her engagement with Robbins. The blow on the head he had given North Star had shattered completely the delicate fabric of illusion she had built up about Robbins. She began no longer to see him masked in the images of her secret romance, but as he was. Then she began to see him as he was to others.

It stunned her to discover that the tide of utter completion with which his presence had at first filled her was beginning to ebb, and with increasing swiftness. She found herself, even in face of an instinctive loyalty, beginning more and more to criticize. What hurt her most was a suspicion that was changing into certainty that the things which were evoking her criticism were not new traits that had been suddenly developed, but were traits that had always been there—that were ingrained in his nature.

She dissected the cause of her blindness. It could not have been love—for two reasons: the one was that, in spite of the superficial cynicism of her world, the majority of them were true women at heart. They wanted love as sincerely as any woman of any class wants love. If it passed them by, they accepted its substitute with a sporting outward show of content or a cloak of cynical indifference.

They did not place their dead illusions in lavender and old rose, with an accompaniment of discreet sighs and pallid cheeks. They tore them from their soul by the roots, so that they might never grow again for their betrayal.

The other reason was that she felt no hate. Her attitude toward Robbins was simply beginning to be tinged with distaste and with contempt. By the time that the wedding was a few days off, she felt that she would not go through with it. He bored her. And he was ill bred.

But it would take courage to say no. It would involve her in a public admission of poor judgment. She would have thought nothing of admitting that she had been wrong in the average run of things that come up for choice; but to have to admit that she had made a mistake in the man whom she had chosen to marry was galling.

It was well known, as such things always are, that her brother had been strongly antagonistic to her even knowing Robbins from the very start. It was equally well known that Robbins's foothold in their society was not based upon any known rights of his own, but rested only upon the precarious quicksands of their complacency.

And Marcia had made that foothold secure; as secure as her own. If she withdrew from her stand by his side, the perilous surface would no longer support him. And she would be regarded as a fool who had learned her lesson in time. She did not like to be thought a fool; nor did she like being told that she had learned lessons.

And if she were forced to put her reasons into words, as she would be, they were slight enough to sound inane. They had to be felt, not spoken, in order to be understood—perfume—the boldness of his

eyes when he kissed her. They were no longer sultry—they were possessive. And their provocative fires were already banked beneath the ashes of achievement.

She admired muscular strength in men. Robbins undoubtedly possessed it. But she sensed that it was already at its peak or on the wane. He would get puffy.

The whole thing was impossible. She had willfully got herself into it and she would take her medicine in getting herself out. What was more, she would take her medicine on the spot instead of evading its bitterness by flight. She wished wholeheartedly she had taken the plunge that night in the motor when he had struck North Star. Her mind had then been tuned to a proper pitch. The words would have come easily. But there had been, then, no words to come.

Her present decision was the fruit of later speculations. She waited, waited for the first opportunity that would present itself which she could use as a handle. But Robbins, too, had learned his lesson. He trod warily, with slippers and gloved hands.

As for North Star, Marcia had come to hate him. It relieved her to have some entity upon whom she could look either as a direct or indirect cause for her uncomfortable position. Ever since the animal had arrived, she convinced herself, there had been trouble. Wilbur had gone off on a burst that was surpassing all previous bounds for elusiveness.

She had made a fool of herself over Robbins. North Star had been directly responsible for having opened her eyes. And no more than any one else did she feel any particularly warm regard for the one who was instrumental in accomplishing that act. Furthermore, North Star had been right in his estimation of Robbins and she had been wrong. She hated him for that.

In the midst of her great confusion the man detailed to feed North Star thought it advisable to inform her that in his opinion the dog was ill.

"Send for a vet," she said.

And her interest in the matter ceased.

The veterinary gave her the results of his examination. She received him in her living room at three in the afternoon. Rob-

bins was calling at three thirty to take her to some affair or other at the Van Horns.

While the veterinary was explaining the cause, development, and essential cure for the disease her mind was busied with the extravagantly vain but soothing hope that Robbins, before three thirty, would have committed some crime or outrage that would serve as a reason for making public her present contempt. But, she reasoned, he did not even possess the weakness of character, that amounts paradoxically to strength, of a good, honest, forceful crook.

His crimes were of omission; in fineness, breeding, intellect, and taste. Repulsion—the word leaped before her and she seized it. It summed up her emotions toward Robbins.

"I would advise," the veterinary was saying, "that the dog be secluded at once. The disease, as I have explained, is highly contagious and deserves the constant care of an interested person."

What was the man saying? Marcia swung from Robbins to the veterinary—constant care of some one who was interested—Wilbur—but Wilbur was away—and in any case his interest in the dog would have been slight at best, otherwise why had he gone off so cavalierly and left him.

"You can treat him either at home, or in his kennel in the country, or you can send the dog to a hospital. With such a fine specimen I would advise the home treatment, preferably in the country. The dog's nerves, for some reason beyond the result of the disease, seem completely overwrought and the strange environment of the hospital, the absence of those whom he loves, is liable to do permanent damage to his nervous system.

"Then there is his pride to consider. A shepherd dog, as of course you know, has a great deal of pride. If you send him away to a hospital he will feel that you are deserting him to strangers. That you no longer want him, because he is diseased."

It was twenty minutes past three. Robbins invariably was punctual. He would be there, standing before her in the room, immaculate, shiny, possessive. in ten minutes.

"Very well," she said. "Thank you."

She rang for Wilkinson as soon as the veterinary had gone. She went to her desk and mulled among the papers in one of its drawers until she found the letter that Michael Lebombard had inclosed with the pieces of her diamond bracelet. On it was an address. She copied both it and his name on a fresh sheet of paper and handed it to Wilkinson when he came in.

"Arrange with the express company," she said, "to have North Star shipped at once to this man at this address. Send a telegram to Mr. Lebombard stating that his dog is being returned to him, and advise him of the time and date of the dog's arrival. State that the dog is suffering from mange. Tell him that my brother, in whose care he left the dog, is away on an indefinite trip and that I believe it advisable to return the dog in order that he may get the personal attention he requires and which I cannot give him here."

"Very good, Miss Marcia."

"Please see to this at once. If possible, get him off by an evening train."

Wilkinson left the room and Marcia's eyes fled at once to the clock. It was twenty-seven minutes after three. She decided to receive Robbins in the drawing-room. She would make an effort to force, if possible, an open break. She put on her hat and neckpiece.

She went downstairs and entered the drawing-room as a clock in the hall chimed the half hour. She seated herself as far from the door as possible. She tried to strengthen a sudden determination that she would refuse to permit him to kiss her. She lowered her veil. Five minutes passed before Wilkinson came in.

"I thought you were upstairs, Miss Marcia. Mr. Robbins is waiting."

"Ask him to come down here."

"Yes, Miss Marcia."

She planned a hundred openings.

Robbins noted the lowered veil and checked an intended embrace. Perhaps it was just as well, he decided. There was an urgent matter of a business nature that his creditors made it imperative for him to bring up. He needed money, a lot of money; at once. He felt a great confidence in his

mastery. Marcia would not refuse, would never refuse him anything. No girl ever had.

"You know we don't have to start until after four, dear," he said, and sat down.

Her openings scattered to the winds.

"In an hour," she said.

"There's something I want you to do for me, dear. Will you?"

Her heart missed a beat. Some subtle intuition warned her that luck was about to break.

"What?" she asked.

"Lend me some money. I'm in a hole and will be tied up for the next few weeks. I need ten thousand to tide me over."

She resisted the desire to close her eyes, but stared at him quite calmly as she heard her own voice saying: "On what security?"

The word took the wind from Robbins. It shocked him into positive amazement. There had been no hint—no warning. The flare-up when he had struck that damned dog was already erased from his memory. The word was a trap diabolically opened beneath his feet and through which he felt a definite sensation of falling. To what?

"Security?"

"Yes. We've never really discussed your financial affairs, have we?"

He stared back at her, astounded. Something was wrong—suddenly—incredibly wrong. But she was a woman. And all women are alike. He'd eased up a bit on the petting since the night of the bench show. That was it! His hitting that damned dog and the ease-up on the petting. He got heavily from his chair.

"What's wrong, dearest?" he said.

"Wrong? Nothing. Why should there be? No—please—I'd rather not—not today—"

He looked at her in perplexity. It was a stall. They all stalled. But he had no time for coaxing. He needed that check before they went to the Van Horns. All he had to do was to get his arms around her. They were strong, husky arms. They always worked.

He reached down and took her hands and dragged her to her feet. He ignored the rigid protest in her body. He clumsily raised her veil and crushed her to him. The

slap of her gloved hand stung him to a rage.

"You little hell cat!"

"Get out."

"Come here!"

"Get out of this house."

Her hand upon the bell checked his advance. His eyes were bloodshot. In back of his blind rage something warned him that he was losing her; that his power over her was gone. He laughed disagreeably as he realized that his hold wasn't.

"Why are you like this?" he said.

"Because it can't go on. I can't explain. It would be fatal for both of us. You'd end up by being as miserable as myself. You ought to be glad."

"Glad you're jilting me?"

"Glad I'm admitting my mistake before it's too late. I don't love you. I've never loved you."

"No?"

"Don't be disgusting!"

"I'm not good enough for you?"

"If you must know it—you're not!"

The blood coarsened his heavy features. "So that's it! But I'm good enough to keep your brother out of jail. Good enough to save him from the chair."

"What do you mean?"

He offered her the version that served him best. She heard him through with pale cheeks and steady eyes.

"Then the price of your silence has gone up?" she said. "In other words, it's hit the high-water mark of my consenting to go through with this marriage?"

He shrugged.

She pressed the bell.

Robbins's eyes widened the fraction of an inch.

"Mr. Robbins is going," she said to Wilkinson. "And Mr. Robbins is not calling again, you understand?"

"Yes, Miss Marcia."

There was a threat in every step that Robbins took to the door.

She telephoned and made an immediate appointment with her lawyer. Then she looked for the three postal cards that Wilbur had sent her and put them in her handbag. She called her maid and instructed her to pack two bags.

She was leaving that night, she informed her, for a flying trip to the Canadian northwest. She would wire if it was necessary to have her trunks follow with further supplies. She would know better what she required when she arrived on the ground.

A curious calmness had fallen upon her. It was a blessed relief to shoulder the burden of her brother's trouble. It seemed infinitely to lighten the burden of her own. The murder charge, of course, was absurd. Wilbur would explain. It was his disinclination, she fathomed, against dragging the family name before the public eye that had caused him to yield to, yes, blackmail.

She despised, yet loved, him for his weakness. Blackmail never paid. Anything was better than that. She'd find him and bring him back. They'd face his trouble together.

Late that evening she boarded the train for the first lap on her journey to the Canadian northwest. Mr. Rudgley, her lawyer, had been most comforting. He arranged for a secretary to recall the wedding invitations and cancel all arrangements. He would also attend, he assured her, to Robbins.

He had deciphered the postmarks on the three postal cards from her brother. They started her off on the proper trail. He agreed with her that Wilbur should be persuaded to return at once. She sank back upon the seat in her compartment and gave her tired nerves over to the swift, soothing motion of the limited.

In a baggage car up forward was North Star. She had completely forgotten his very existence. She had her bed made up. She went to sleep.

CHAPTER X.

A WHITE CROSS.

THE motion of the train, the noise, the shriek of the whistle, the sway of the baggage car, the slats of his hastily constructed crate, drove North Star into a frenzy of hate, distrust, and despair. His heart struck the depths and he lost all faith in mankind.

The days aboard the express car of the limited were unbearable torture. The

branch line to which his crate was eventually transferred proved worse. The roadbed was far from the best, and the old-fashioned freight car that served for baggage rocked crazily from side to side, stopped with violent jerks that sent his numbed, aching body crashing against the side of the crate, and started forward again with the same violence.

He conceived a bitter anger at the crate; at the wooden slats that confined him within its narrow space. Even the baggage car itself seemed desirable. There were but few trunks and a couple of boxes on its splintered floor.

If he could summon the strength to force one of the slats from its place; if he could push but a little harder against the one that appeared to give when his body had been hurled against it by a sudden stop, then he could get out. Perhaps, some place in the car, he could find some water. His whole throat was parched with fever.

The train came to a stop with a sickening succession of crashes. A guard came into the baggage and flung open the side door. North Star watched his every motion. His fever-ridden eyes saw the man's hand take hold of the peg and pull it from its staple, saw him roll back the door, saw, through the aperture, a sight that awoke long dormant memories in his weary heart.

Pine forest, great trees, a patch of sky, a flood of assuaging things. He stayed still until the man had closed the door and left the car.

The train resumed its course. Then he stood upon his feet and, lowering his head, pressed a shoulder against the yielding slat. It began to give. He forced his last remaining courage into a final heave. The slat gave and he tumbled weakly out upon the floor of the car.

He lay still, trembling, his tongue hanging out and his breath coming in short, desperate gasps. He got up and made a circuit of the car. There was no water. But through a crack under the door came grateful gusts of fresh air.

He lay alongside of it, pressing his nose as close as he could. The bewildering scent that tugged at his memory grew stronger:

the scent of the pine forest, the scent of home. That was it!—the home of his birth. His pain, his lethargy passed from him like the shadow of a cloud.

He was on his feet in an instant—trembling, but this time with an emotion of unbelievable relief and joy. Stronger and stronger rushed back the flood of his memories.

With every familiar scent they increased until, as he sensed with that psychic power which defies explanation that he was even at that moment passing the exact locality of his birth, of his true home with old Daddy Michael Lebombard, of his sister Vidinette, and his brother Jacques, he could no longer restrain himself, but gave voice to his joy in a sharp bark.

He felt that his single chance for life lay in immediate escape, in immediate flight to his home and to Daddy Lebombard, who would know what to do for his torments.

He stood upon his hind legs and braced himself against the door. He took hold of the wooden peg with his teeth. He pulled. And the peg came out of its staple. He jumped backward just in time to stop from falling through as the door rolled open.

Before his eyes stretched a flashing row of tall pine trees. Familiar scents overwhelmed him with their flood. He stood upon the edge of freedom. He tensed his muscles for a leap from the moving train.

Even were he to embrace death he was determined to make that leap. It represented to him his solitary chance of escaping to the haven of his birthplace and to old Daddy Michael Lebombard.

Large drifts of dazzling snow still lay parallel to the roadbed, snow, whose crust had been thawed out by the sun. A pile larger than the rest came flashing into view. He crouched. He leaped, hurtling his body through the air and away from the crashing train.

He plowed up to his neck in the great bank of thawing snow. He lay quiet—motionless. The train clattered past, clattered ever softer into the distance.

North Star was free. He could not know that a great tragedy would confront him in this freedom.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Suspense

By **BEATRICE ASHTON VANDEGRIFT**

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

HER WEDDING DAY.

MY wedding day—when I was to sever all ties and follow the man I loved to our little gay home in the Bronx!

I watched the sun burst over the back alley, pale and hazy at first, then spreading glorious through the gray skies like a lump of hot butter in a cold batter, and thought of the other scenes it had witnessed. For it was the same sun that had nosed over the Nile to open Cleo's heavy-lidded eyes. It was the same sun that had tiptoed into the gloomy tomb where Romeo and his Julie laid. It was the same sun that had smiled on a million lovers and yet—to-day—it was a different one, somehow.

And before it had even commenced to warm the western sky, I would be stepping into a swell meter machine with my Andy and tour to the Municipal Building where a distinguished judge or something would ask us do we take each other for better or worse? And we would say: "Leave out the worse. There ain't gonna be none."

Then we would cross the river and board a beautiful green plush parlor car and be whisked away to the Delaware Water Gap, where we had engaged an elegant suite—and Andy would hold my hand real romantic all the way.

Andy!—I twisted my head as I personally applied a marcel, and risking a seared ear, turned to look at the little picture I had of him on the wash-stand beside my bed. I'd had it there a year, ever since I promised to wait. And now there wasn't

going to be no more waiting. He was coming for me to-day. Somehow, it didn't seem real.

I looked at him again. His arms was crossed masterful and he was gazing straight at me with them sober brown eyes of his. And though his lips tried to be stern, there was the hint of a little crinkle to 'em that made you think, if he hadn't been posing for his photo, he'd of been laughing. And his hair—it was brushed back slick *à la* shiek, but over the temple a stray lock commenced to edge away from the rest, and I knew that as soon as the camera had clicked he would be tossing it back with that quick jerk of his head that made him so boyish.

My Andy! I looked at them brown eyes again, meeting mine so steady and sober, and of a sudden everything did seem real—terrible real.

A sizzle sounded from the back of my neck and a crisp smell of scorched shingles filled the air. At that minute come the pad-pad of my landlady's hoofs on the landing and a pause outside the portal. Then a sniff.

"Hah, I smell a rat!" sneered a voice and the door pushed open. It was my last day and I could afford to be snappy.

"Rat, nothing," I come back, haughty. "It's my own hair."

She sniffed again and jerked the wire from the light socket.

"Blowing out the fuses and leaving the house pitch dark!" she snorted.

"It's shady enough now," I commented, daring and malicious. She eyed me, beligerent but uncomprehending.

"Fussing, fixing, crimping," she resumed. "What's the girls coming to nowadays?"

"You said it—they're *coming to*," I remarked, but it went over her head like a transformation.

Delivering me a look which would of blasted a hardier flower than I she slammed from my boudoir with a remark that a parrot wouldn't of repeated. And that was the one tie I had to sever!

Yet I was kinda glad after all that I was only a lone orphan in the great city. If I of had folks they'd be making a lot of fuss over me and, according to schedule, wept

for the bride. And I wondered as I thought of it why any woman should weep on the day that was another woman's happiest. There just wasn't no sense to it.

It was a relic of the barberless past when tough guys in whiskers and leopard skins would sneak up on the fold and frisk away the fairest. There was some idea in taking on then—at the sight of the youngest and tenderest being hauled off by her long and beauteous hair, growed especial for the purpose—unconscious, with a brutal bruise on her wan, white cheek. And they wonder why us present day dames totes the short and snappy boy bob and protecting face enamel!

And so I clumb into my chic new blue bridal crape, crowded myself with a cunning little bonnet and sailed downstairs to turn over the key to my attic prison.

The landlady was real willing to pocket it plus two weeks' back rent, and now that I was leaving, began to be almost pleasant.

"Well, well, Miss Corbett," she remarked with a twisty smile, "so you're really gonna be married! My, to think this is the one happy day of your life! For you can't count on the rest of 'em, deary, and never know what you're letting yourself in for. When I married Mr. O'Dinkle—just a trusting, young girl—I understand I was to make a home for *him*—not for twenty odd others."

She sighed gusty, blowing the strings of hair outta her pale blue eyes, and folded the bills I had give her.

"Marriage," she continued, weary, talking through her nose like a kazoo, "is like eating in a strange restaurant. You'll maybe get what you want and you'll maybe not. But there's one thing sure—you gotta pay for it."

She tucked the green joy-givers down inside her chest and waddled with me to the front door.

"Well, so long, deary," she called, almost cheerful. "Gord knows I certainly hopes you'll be happy."

I shook off a creeping chill, squared my shoulders and subbed down to the office where I had promised the boss to put in a final half day before giving him the permanent opportunity to discover what a sterling

stenog had been stole from the staff. I hadn't informed him just why I was going. Being an old bach he wouldn't of understood why a woman would rather leave off spanking the keys at thirty per for spanking the kids at try-and-get-it per. So I had merely told him I was quitting for a "better position."

"One with a future, I trust," he remarked, affable enough for him, "and a chance to rise."

"Sure, it's all future," I answered, enigmatic, "and there's plenty of time to rise—at six thirty A. M.," I added, soda voice.

But the crowd knew the news, and as I kidded the keys that morning I was the cynic's cure of all eyes. Some of the girls had been privately doubting my ability to hook a husband, especially one that didn't expect this fifty-fifty, you-give-half, I-take-half arrangement of modern matrimony. But so far as I knew, Andy had every intention of supporting me in the style to which I was not accustomed, and all I had to do was to remain comfortably at home in a Bronx flat, perform the cooking, washing and worrying, look after the ice, coal and meat bills and take care of any other little trifle that might come along in the natural course of events in my coming new life.

And as I thought of these things my heart grew warm and sweet, so that when I idly binged the buttons I knew not what I wrote. Anyhow, what did it matter? At two P. M. I would be making my grand exit—and the doors of the old life would swing to behind me forever.

In fact, I become real gay and reckless, snapping snippily at the boss and my associates, unburdening my soul that one glorious morning of the effervescings I had been cold storing ever since I hit the outfit—and, like the Kaiser, I got away with murder.

"Hey, you!" the old crab would roar, summoning me to the sanctum. "What the double darn damn is the idea of this?" waving a letter addressed to one Mrs. Andrew R. Gibbons. "Since when has the Harlem Ham Products had a female for its head?"

I blushed. Unconscious, I must of writ

my new married name on the salutation. But I come back snappy.

"Pardon me," I snickered. "My error. It should read the 'Harlem Home Products' and you can bet your last year's toupee it's going to have a female for its head."

"You're decidedly impertinent, young woman," he hissed, sour.

"Impertinent," I aired, "but not peevish, thank Gord," and I swept from the room, settling myself serene in my seat.

Ida Snyder, a typist of the feline species, eyed me interested.

"Well, well, Elsie," she catnipped, "so you're gonna get married—finally?"

"Finally?" I cooed. "Nothing's final, my child—least of all matrimony."

Of course I didn't believe it, but it sounded clever.

"Going to keep on working?" she asked, sidetracked.

"I am marrying a *man*," I answered, "not a *mantelpiece*. If any one stays to home it'll be me. I want a guy that's willing to fare forth into the great, wild, gropin' spaces where subways are subways and only the fittest survive."

Here I suggestively broadcasted the feeble file clerks and drowsy draft boys a sugary smile of sarcasm, but it took like a vaccination on a graven image. Gee, it must be wonderful to be dumb!

"But won't you miss the excitement of the business world?" put in Cora, the cute little comptometress.

"Miss it!" I echoed, disdainful. "Miss what? The morning subway jam, three hours of snarled shorthand and dumfoozled dictation, a chocolate éclair and a cup of coffee, four hours of manicuring the boss's so-called English and being addressed like a golf ball, then home again to a rented room to recoup for the next installment. And we women calls that a career!"

"Well, it may be all right for some," I concluded, smug, "but thank Heaven I'm through with it in another hour." I looked at the clock with satisfaction, while my audience sat, awed. "In one hour!" I repeated.

Here the switchboard Sarah interrupted with the announcement that I was desired

at the phone. I ambled leisurely across the waiting room and tapped the tinkle tube to the left ear. It was Andy.

CHAPTER II.

POSTPONEMENT.

MY heart turned over, so warm that if it had been a flapjack it would have browned on both sides.

"Oh-h, Andy!" I breathed. "Where are you?"

His voice was quick and hurried and a little impatient.

"Over to the office," he told me. "Now listen, honey, I can't make it by two. Stick around till five, dear, and I'll come for you in time to get hitched for that five forty-four Lackawanna—"

"Why can't we get married at two?" I choked.

"Because I won't be through in time," he explained in them irritable accents that denotes somebody is listening at the other end. "Got some business to fix up—think I can pull down a little bonus when the boss gets back this afternoon. It'll come in handy on our honey-cr—trip."

"I don't care about no old bonus," I pouted, near to tears. "And besides, it's bad luck to postpone a wedding. Oh, Andy, why don't you come for me now?"

"I can't," he insisted, stubborn.

"You'd better," I pleaded, desperate. "Oh, Andy, I feel if you don't come for me now something terrible will happen. Please, Andy, please. You know how I hate—suspense."

"Now, listen, dear," he resumed with patient exasperation, "you don't savvy how nice this extra dough's gonna fit in. So just sit tight or do something useful and wait for me—see? Now I gotta beat it. Can't talk so good here so I'm hanging up. No, I ain't mad at you. I'm just hanging up."

I turned, my heart dead, and faced the fishy eyes of the audience.

"Well?" they intoned.

"Andy says," I gulped, tearful, then recovered my customary poise. "I have decided," I announced, "not to be wedded till later in the day," and I set down to

my desk, businesslike, and tried to decipher my chicken scrawl shorthand.

A little titter circled around me and my skin prickled. Then come the gurgling giggle of Ida Snyder.

"In *one* hour," she mimicked, and the rest laughed.

I raised my head haughty.

"According to Mr. Einstein," I remarked, cool, "time is relative—and to me it's a poor relative. One hour or ninety," I added, nonchalant, "don't make no difference in my young life."

All afternoon I resumed my duties as in a dream. Here I was supposed to be a bride and I wasn't. I gazed around me, feeling aloof and detached like a spirit, and it did seem like death. Of course, that's what I always thought marriage would be—a kind of death and a waking up to find yourself in heaven. But I didn't know it was going to turn out this way—a death where you wake up to find yourself earthbound.

Twice I had to face the boss again, and I done so in fear and trembling, remembering how sassy I had been that morning. It was like tweeking the lion's tail and trying to run—and discover you're rooted to the spot.

And all the time I felt like a jumper, all keyed up with every ounce of nerve and pep, who takes the final run for the jump and is brung up sharp at the tape line. Frustrated momentum is an awful thing.

So the gang razzed me, good natured but galling. Only Pell Prendergast, the sap, showed what a friend he was. He hook-eyed the rest of the afternoon just to tote my grips across the ferry and said he would wait for me till I come. Which I thought was real sweet of him, seeing as how he was merely a former dejected suitor of mine, poor Pell.

And outside the gray skies glowered, with the sun busting through like a false promise.

At last my Andy came.

Of a sudden the skies cleared and the sun sailed high in a sea of whitecap clouds. Then I took his arm, proud, and smiled at them who had doubted. And even Ida Snyder come to me, fawning, to prove the old gag that the cat what scratches the hardest purrs the loudest.

"Oh, Elsie, dear," she chortled, "ain't it wonderful? And wouldn't you let me come to the wedding? I'll bring the gang at five and we'll see you off right, huh?"

"That 'll be great," I told her, benevolent. And so I left them, Ida calling out something about forgetting my handkerchief.

Handkerchiefs! What for, I'd like to know? There wasn't gonna be no more weeping or wailing or gnashing of teeth—and besides I could borrow Andy's. He had a big lavender silk one, folded kitty-corner and stuck up prominent in his breast pocket. And say, didn't he look swell? He wore a bow tie and an English straw with a saw edge and on his lapel he bore a white gardenia.

I snuggled over in the opposite corner of the taxi, just so I could look at him, because it didn't seem him.

And he looked at me, too, as if I didn't seem me. Then after a pause he said formal that my dress was real pretty. I said I was glad he liked it and didn't it turn out to be a nice day after all? He agreed to that without no reservations and apologized for running it late. I said that was perfectly all right.

We sat, not knowing what to say, him wrestling with his gloves and me studying a passing landscape.

Then of a sudden the taxi swerved and I found myself in his arms just like old times, and he whispered over and over again under my cocked hat, "Oh, honey, honey, dear!" and I sobbed in his collar button: "Oh, Andy, I thought you was never coming!"

Then another silence hung, but it wasn't an empty one, for our hearts kept up conversation though our lips couldn't. And Andy kissed me right on Columbus Circle. I shut my eyes.

A terrible voice was booming, breaking our bliss like a bomb: "Say, you over there, don't let me catch you doing that again!"

It was a cop.

"Oh, Andy," I exclaimed, sitting up flustered, "he seen us!"

But Andy smiled, soothing, and said, "Naw, honey, he was just bawling the driver out for clipping a corner."

Finally we come to the Municipal Building, rising like a finger pointing to heaven with Justice standing atop blindfold. I asked Andy why that was and he said so she wouldn't have to view the mistakes done in her name.

Then I took his arm and we climbed one flight of stone steps with the hesitation movement, as they do in real weddings, though my high heels teetered like stilts.

Finally we come to the right door and went in. The room was big and dark and cluttered with papers so that it looked just like any old office—and I thought it was going to be like a church.

Andy garnered some blanks to fill out and I set down to table alongside a cute little blonde with dreamy eyes who smiled at me congenial. So I took pen in hand and commenced to write down the facts that would show I was worthy of being my Andy's bride, while my heart fluttered to a sweet, invisible music that was singing in my ears.

"All right, honey?" Andy wanted to know, after finishing his. "Better let me look it over to be sure you ain't done nothing dumb. Hey," he broke off, amused, "how do you get this way?"

"What way?"

"Here, opposite *color* you've went and wrote down 'tan.'"

"Why, ain't that right, Andy? You couldn't call me 'white' after last Sunday's swim down to Coney, could you?"

Andy smiled superior and showed me how it should be did. Then a man at a cashier's window made us elevate our right hands and swear that what we said was God's truth. So he handed us a certificate and told us we could walk up one flight, save money and get married.

We strolled out to the big hall where a high window poured in a soft light that warmed the cold stone—and it was almost like a church there.

Andy wanted to stop a minute, but I said: "Hurry, Andy!"

He didn't hear me, only raised my chin and looked.

"No, Andy—hurry, hurry and you can have a million of 'em," I urged, knowing what he wanted.

"All right," he smiled, "but this is the last chance I'll have to kiss—Elsie Corbett."

I give in. Then we walked to the door that led to the new life. It was locked.

CHAPTER III.

DELAY.

"**D**AMN!" said Andy, smothered.

We knocked. No one come. The joint was as deserted as the Polo Grounds after a World Series game.

"Maybe it's the wrong door," I suggested, a cold chill gripping me.

"Well, it's the right number," he insisted.

He knocked again and the sound scampered down the dim hall, racing back to us with an echo like a laugh.

"Nobody home," he announced, removing his hat, perplexed.

We stood there, desolate as though St. Peter had barred us from the gates of heaven. Then, through the gray light, come a little old man that did look like St. Peter himself, though he trailed a broom instead of a harp.

"Listen, uncle," spoke up Andy, breezy, "where's all the folks?"

The old man wedged his broom between his shaky knees and excavated a gold watch as big as a cabbage.

"Ten after five," he mumbled. "They must of gone home."

"Now, listen," blustered Andy, "don't tell me that. We just come up from downstairs with a certificate and want to get married. See?"

"They's nothing wrong with my eyesight at all," remarked the fellow, soft-voiced but facetious.

"Come off it, uncle," growled Andy, formidable. "I ain't looking for humor. I want to get married."

"No, they *ain't* much connection between 'em," muttered Old Walrus without splitting a smile.

"Say, are you kidding me?" bellowed my prospecting husband. "Ain't you able to wedge it into your bean that me and the lady has serious intentions of committing immediate matrimony?"

"In the city of New York during the last year," answered the guy, quoting statistics, "they has been sixty thousand like you. One more or less don't make no difference. I see 'em coming—I see 'em going—it's all the same to me—"

He turned to go, but Andy snatched him savage by his high, ravenlike shoulders.

"Listen, uncle," he begged, "talk sense. We got to get married right away. Now, where's the party that 'll do it?"

"I'm telling you they've gone home," repeated old Father William, weary. "You better come to-morrow."

"*To-morrow!*" echoed Andy in the voice a condemned man would use on his last day—and "to-morrow!" I chorused, weak.

I took his arm and we retraced, silent, stunned. And as we come out from under the grim gray arch a battery of laughing voices bombarded us with: "Here comes the bride—who shaved the groom?"

It was the gang.

In a minute the enemy surrounded us. Andy and I was parted like a haircut. Rice pelted us like hail and every time I would stoop to dodge it, the girls would pour it down my neck. Then the party got wild. The boys had captured Andy, using his right hand for a pump and his shoulder blades for drums, the while raining loud whispers in his ears that turned them red.

"Remember," teased Bob Beaver, "you're naming the first after me!"

"Sure, sure," promised Andy, bashful, ducking a good-natured biff in the beezer. "If it's a boy it's Robert—if a girl Roberta."

I shook off a storm of congratulating kisses from my well-meaning women friends and glared. Hartman Brooks was smiling at me, simpish.

"Well, he won you, Elsie, fair and square," he commented, rueful, "but I guess I can take my medicine."

"What kind?" I snapped, sarcastic. "Arsenic or little liver pills?"

Our party was attracting attention. Folks stood on the corner and beamed at us benevolent. One of the girls had inserted a bouquet of lily-of-the-valley into my unconscious claw, so my estate was immistakable.

I seethed, turning to include the world at large in one single, withering glare—and met a sea of smiles. The yellow map of a grinning Chink stood out above the rest.

"Oh, lookie," he chortled, silly. "Just married—nice li'l blight'n gloom!"

Blight and gloom was right.

After a while the gang run out of stock jokes and suggested we embark for the ferry. We done so, a new volley of fire burning our ears like a sandstorm, while the crowd corraled a herd of taxis to follow ours.

We chugged from the curb. Cries and whistles and toots echoed behind us. Then come the splinter of glass over our shoulders and an old shoe plopped into my lap.

Our driver got out.

"Who done that?" he wanted to know, his face purple. "Who the hell done that?"

The gang looked sheepish.

"Say, listen," threatened the guy, ferocious, "if the guilty party don't own up pronto I'll be driving a funeral instead of a wedding. I'm a peaceful, well meaning man, I am, but I don't stand for the rough stuff. Now, who done that?"

Hartman sneered and slipped a bill into his clenched fist.

"I ain't no detective," he said, haughty, "but maybe a ten 'll salve your wounded feelings, my boy?"

Our driver reëmbarked, partly pacified, and we resumed.

"This is a nice way to start our married life," complained Andy with a chuckle.

I looked at him, rigid under his tightening arm.

"Married?" I hooted. "How do you get that way?"

"That's what I'd like to know," he muttered, desperate. "Oh, Elsie!"

Of a sudden he caved in and laid his face on my shoulder. I leave it lay.

"If we had got married this morning like I wanted to—" I started out, huffy.

"I know," he groaned. "I'm making a punk husband."

"You ain't no husband at all," I reminded him, severe. "Don't be forgetting that."

"Why, ain't we practically married?" he inquired, astonished.

"Practically ain't absolutely," I told him. "Oh, Andy, what 'll we do?"

He thought a minute.

"I think we can make the five forty-four yet," he deduced.

"Andy Gibbons!" shrieked I, "I can't go on no train with you."

"Why not?"

"I ain't married."

"Well, and you wasn't married the day we took that trip to Asbury, was you?" he blurted, sullen.

"That was different," I explained, frigid. "It was daytime then."

"Great Heavens," he growled, "what's the difference between day and night? A mere matter of the earth's revolutions. Do you mean to sit there and tell me that because this darn old terrestrial globe has turned over so that a planet called the sun happens to be shedding its immediate rays on a place called China, Elsie Corbett can't go to the Delaware Water Gap with Andrew Gibbons unless some gink by the name of Jones, Brown, Smith or Doe has first pulled a little hocus-pocus do-you-take stuff and signed said name of Jones, Brown, Smith or Doe on a plain, ordinary piece of paper? Say, what's in a name anyhow, as Mr. Shake-a-weapon often says?"

"Andy," I returned, sober, "it may be Jones, Brown, Smith or Doe, but it's the name that changes mine to yours, and until it is changed I can't go to no Del-Delaware W-Water Gap."

"I know, honey," said Andy, all the wildness gone. "I know you can't. I was talking crazy, that's all. Forget it. What ho! We are arrived at the ferry."

"I won't set foot on it," I declared.

"Why?" he asked, sly. "Do you want me to carry you?"

"I can't go," I repeated. "I just can't go."

"Why not? We could let the crowd see us off, sneak over, spend the evening and a little coin at the Palisades and hike back in time for a late supper. What say, huh?" he coaxed, becoming enthusiastic.

I gulped.

"I know it'd be nice," I said slow, laying my hand on his, "but I can't do it. You see, Andy," I explained, my eyes averted,

"I've been thinking so long of crossing this river as—as Mrs. Andrew R. Gibbons that—that I just can't bear to cross it plain Elsie C-Corbett."

"Not 'plain' Elsie Corbett," he contradicted, vehement. "Beautiful, sweet, wonderful Elsie Corbett—" His voice broke. "And she ain't mine," he finished.

The gang was hot on our trail, hurling last minute advice.

"We've got to board this boat!" hissed Andy in my ear. "Or they 'll think something's funny."

"Funny?" I chortled. "Ha, ha! Try to locate the humor."

I hung back, but Andy hooked my hand and hauled me across the border line. Folks jammed in after us and pressed us on through. Andy was turning to wave farewell to the gang. In a flash I ducked and run through the crowd up the stairs of the boat. Chains were creaking and the whistle tooted as I bust forth on the upper platform and made for the gangplank. I crossed it and they pulled it up. Andy was behind me, across the moat—his face white.

"Andy!" I shrieked, hysterical. "Come, Andy, come!"

There was a churning beneath us, the clang of two bells, and the big crab left the pier, snubbing against loose piles as it went.

"Andy!" I screamed.

He stumbled toward me, then jumped. Across the churn of white foam he leaped like an agonized goat and clung to the outside of the iron gate.

"Damn fool!" growled the gateman, letting him in. "You ought to be pinched for that."

He wasn't pinched but squeezed—my own, brave Andy!

Then we sobered down.

"Now what?" he inquired.

CHAPTER IV.

ADrift IN THE CITY.

"I DON'T know," I answered, hard up for an idea for once in my resourceful young life.

"I guess you'd better go home for the night," he told me.

I turned on him like a tiger cat.

"Andrew Gibbons," I hissed, "I would rather die!"

"Well, anyhow," he proposed, "let's get something to eat."

I went.

It was a dinky little spaghetti place with a potted palm in a brass bowl decorating the front window, and there was an atmosphere of moldy bread sticks. Andy ordered the bohunk waiter to unravel him a couple of yards of spaghetti *à la* Garibaldi, then asked me what I wanted.

"Nothing much," I told him, indifferent.

"Aw, come on," he begged. "I know you're hungry. Ain't you a woman?"

"Well," I allowed myself to be influenced, "suppose you have 'em trot me out some of that there boiled turkey wings with curry of rice—"

"Flurry of rice is more like it," he broke in, blushing, while the waiter grinned. In delving into his breast pocket for the lavender hanky he had produced a snowstorm of well-known bridal confetti, a souvenir of the crowd's send-off.

They brung on the food. And I thought, as I tried to choke it down, what a wonderful dinner we would be having if Fate had kept a certain guy we'd never seen before and would never see again only ten minutes longer in his office. We'd be on the train this minute, watching night pour over the Jersey meadows, and there would be a snowy white tablecloth between us, all ashine with elegant glass and silver, and a respectful waiter in a dress suit would be bowing double and asking Andy, "Does Mrs. Gibbons care for a bit of creamed chicken en casteroil or would Mrs. Gibbons prefer some clams *à la* big neck with horse-radish?"

But I didn't say nothing of these thoughts to Andy. I was learning that men don't understand things the way us women do. It seems that God gives us dames a special passport to a land of dreams where the men folks can't follow—only stand waiting at the gate for us to come back to 'em.

Then we danced to the wheeze of a couple of fiddles and a tin-lined piano, played by a long-haired Romeo with a cold cig-

arette hanging easy from his lips which he would park every once in a while between two certain black keys and commence singing in a voice full of stifled passion: "You left me ow-it in the rain-n-n!"

And as I danced I buried my nose tight against the withered little gardenia on my bridegroom's lapel, and if tears counted for anything it should of revived immediate.

Time toddled on.

"Now what?" I wanted to know, watching Andy labor with his demitask. "What's next on our delightful little program?"

"How about a hike up the Avenue?" suggested my should-of-been husband with spirit.

"All right," I agreed, anxious to join the fashion promenade and show off my new wedding gown. "It suits me to a tee, as Mr. Hagen might of put it."

Coy, I grabbed hold my Andy's laundry lugger and we set forth for the avenue, so-called Fifth because it usually takes five figures to make its acquaintance, while I done it in one. Now, don't receive the idea I'm in the habit of handing myself homage. I merely wish to state that mine is the sort of thirty-six that puts the "suits" in bathing suits.

Even Andy, a mere male, noticed the hit I was creating and as he looked down at me, admiring the dignity and poise with which I swept along, I could see he was appreciating at last how well bread his buttered half was. Yet, while I walked, leaning on my escort's arm and turning to meet his gaze with a vague, interested smile, inside my heart there drummed the solemn notes of a dead march.

Then a different music come to our ears. We stopped beside a long striped awning that crawled from the church to the curb where an assortment of craning necks had assembled. Then the music stopped and down the striped lane come a bride all in white, and a man, not half so handsome as Andy, steered her by the elbow to a big blue limousine that was waiting. A bride—!

"Gee, ain't she beautiful?" I whispered to Andy, as her smiling face peered from the car. "Just like a queen."

"I ain't seeing her," said Andy, uninterested. "I'm looking right at you, sweet."

"But I ain't a bride," I reminded him, tremulous.

"Well, by heck, you're going to be!" he cried, fierce. "The man that married her can marry us!"

He hitched hold of my hand and dragged me through the mob that was still emptying outta the church.

"Don't, Andy, don't!" I warned him, scared, but he didn't hear me.

In a minute we was standing inside, alone save for each other and the white-robed minister that was walking contemplative towards the altar, banked with lilies and white roses.

We strolled up the aisle, slow, and even Andy was hushed. Then we come to the first marble steps.

"Mister!" called Andy, soft but insistent, and gripped my hand tighter.

The minister turned, fingering his long, purple scarf. When he lamped us he give a start.

"We want to get married, mister," announced Andy, hopeful.

The man looked ever more surprised, and a queer, scornful smile crept into the corners of his mouth—or it might of been only the shadows, shifting in the light of the candles.

"—Immediate," added Andy.

Still he did say nothing.

"Say, ain't you the one that tied the couple that just ambled out?" my fiancé wanted to know.

"I am."

"Then won't you tie us?" pleaded Andy. "Look, we got the ring and the certificate and everything."

"I'm sorry," said the preacher, turning away.

But Andy touched his long white sleeve, reverent yet persistent.

"Please, mister."

The servant of God winced, like he had been touched by the plague.

"I'm sorry," he said again, firm and cold as the marble on the altar.

"You hitched *them*," argued Andy.

Then the minister burst forth, vehement.

"Have you any idea, young man, who *they* were?"

"I'm listening," said Andy.

"They were," he announced, portentous, rolling his notes like thunder, "Miss Mary Van Adrian Schuyler and Sir Edward Tristram Hydewater."

"Well," put in Andy, hot, "they ain't got nothing on us. We're Mr. Andrew Riggs Gibbons and Miss Elsie Marie Corbett, and I'd like to know why in—"

"Andy," I interrupted, gentle, understanding what he couldn't, "I'm sure the Reverent has did enough for one day. He must be all tired out. No, Andy, don't. We can go somewheres else."

I took his arm and enforced an exit.

"Say, I'd like to know why the dickens that guy couldn't tote out his prayer book and spill a few words on top of us," he complained.

"He just couldn't, Andy," I soothed. "You see—he's society."

"Well, we'll get somebody else then," declared my embittered half. But we couldn't.

Eight nickels later Andy was willing to admit that the clergy simply wasn't to home that evening.

"They must be all away on a convention or something," I surmised. "Maybe at—the D-Delaware Water G-Gap."

At a sudden the dam bust and the flood flowed.

"Aw, shucks, honey," babied Andy. "Listen, don't do that, dear, right out here on the street. Dry up, Elsie, or everybody will be wondering who you are."

I turned on him savage, glaring through a mist of tears.

"Well, I'm wondering it myself," I snapped. "Yes, that's just what I'd like to know. *Who am I?* I ain't Mrs. Gibbons. I ain't Elsie Corbett. I ain't nobody. No, don't touch me! You can't touch a ghost, can you?" I laughed, hysterical.

"Now, listen, honey," begged Andy scared. "Listen, dear, turn off the tear taps. I'll tell you what," he added, bright, "we'll hike over to Broadway and take in one of those greatest love stories ever filmed."

"Greatest love stories ever flim-flammed," I snarled, vicious, allowing the tears free rain. "Huh, it's gonna be great to set and watch the handsome hero hew

through fire, flood and fighting to win his woman in the face of fickle fate, her furious father and a rip-roaring rival, while beside me snores the poor sap that ain't got enough gumption to be my husband when I'm handing him myself free, postpaid and delivered right to the door. Yah!"

"Go on," said Andy, humble. "I deserve it."

I choked back a fresh string of warming adjectives.

"Continue," he encouraged. "I *want* you to help me call myself names."

"Well, I don't do it," I gulped, sopping up the sobs. "Oh, my dear, good Andy!"

He pulled me into the deep door of one of them swell shops—dark it was, and deserted—and let me water the gardenia on his lapel.

"Oh, Elsie," he whispered, husky, "do you think I'm bearing it any better than you?"

I clung close, trembling, then I lifted my head and smiled.

"Andy," I said, giggling through the hiccups, "we're a couple of nuts. Why, we—we're having a wonderful time, ain't we, Andy? What's the matter with us anyhow, acting up like kids that has to stay home from the circus?"

He laughed, too, and kissed me cute on the cheek.

"Now where's that greatest love story ever filmed?" I inquired cheery.

"Over on little old Broadway," he answered, hilarious. "Lead us to it!" And we went, tramping in happy march time like the parade of the wooden soldiers.

CHAPTER V.

KILLING TIME.

WE sat through two shows. It wasn't a love story after all, but a picture of wedded life, showing how a neglected wife finally commences going with another man because her golf-goofy hubby pays more attention to his putting than his petting.

But I didn't hold it up as no moral to Andy. I was too weary to do anything but set, grabbing his hand grim and think-

ing—well, we'd be slipping into the Delaware Water Gap now, driving up to the hotel in a big hired limousine, and a respectful porter would say: "Shall I take up Mrs. Gibbons's bags, sir. I believe you have reserved the best room in the house, suite sixteen, overlooking the balcony." And Andy would wave the menial to his task and step up to the desk and write: "Mr. Andrew R. Gibbons and wife of the city of New York" in a real leather book. And the clerk would bow twice and say: "Very good, Mr. Gibbons, and does Mrs. Gibbons desire to have ice water sent to her room?"

It was eleven when the silver sheet bid us good night. We come out, the bright lights of Broadway hurting our eyes, and I took Andy's arm and promenaded him up the Milky Way to look in little stores at hats and beaded bags that he wanted to buy me, but I wouldn't let him because he wasn't my husband.

Then my feet commenced reading the riot act and I felt kinda tired all of a sudden.

"Andy," I says, clutching his shoulder, "what 'll we do now?"

He thought a minute.

"Eat again!" he suggested, inspired. "Here, let's duck into this joint."

"I knew we'd end up in the hospital," I commented, making a survey of the white tiled walls and sterilized table tops. "No, all I want is a cup of coffee — honest, Andy."

"Two cups coffee, a roast beef sandwich, fried potatoes on the side and apple pie with cream," he ordered, vigorous.

I snickered. Is there any situation in which a man can't eat? Our Broadway brothers likes to call us the "bill of fare sex," but they is at least two times in a woman's life when the menu means nothing—when she's happy and when she ain't.

And the assortment of stuff he'd ordered would of upset a cast iron donkey.

"Andrew Gibbons," I exploded, "you ain't going to put that junk in your stomach *this* time of night!"

"Where will I put it?" he asked, eying me, grumpy.

"Don't get funny," I frowned. "You

oughtta have more sense yourself than to order a collection of liver-lambasters like that."

The waiter was standing at attention, an inquisitive look lighting his map.

"Did yah wanta change anything?" he inquired, but Andy cut him short with: "The order stands good. Now, make it snappy."

I drew myself up with dignity.

"Andy," I said, trying to remain calm, "you ain't going to touch one morsel of that awful stuff!"

"Who says I ain't?"

"I say so."

He smiled, self-contained.

"And who are you?" he wanted to know.

I gulped.

"All right, Andy," I surrendered. "You win—I ain't nobody."

Andy shifted his shoulders, huffy.

"You was almost forgetting," he reminded, "that I am still a happy, carefree bach."

At that I flamed.

"Well, and you can continue such!" I cried, hot, "so far as little Elsie Corbett is concerned."

His face fell, and a plastic surgeon couldn't of lifted it.

"Aw, Elsie," he pleaded, reaching across the table for my paw. "Aw, Elsie, I was only kidding, honest. I—I don't want to be no care-free bach— You—didn't mean what you just said either, I am sure you didn't, honey?"

"I'm usually in the habit of meaning what I say," I declared, frozen, though commencing to thaw.

Silence weighed, but nobody bothered to read the scales.

"All right," he finally choked, feeling for his hat.

I surveyed him, my heart hammering.

"Where you going, Andy?" I inquired.

"Out," he said, his mouth tight.

"You set right down again and eat your dinner," I ordered. "Look, the guy's coming with the food." I grabbed a menu, frantic. "Look, Andy, they got some nice banana fritters on the bill. Why don't you take some of them, too? They sound real good."

"I guess I will," decided Andy, bright, settling back—and the meal progressed with cheer.

But as I watched him stow away the fried potatoes, the apple pie, the banana fritter and a sandwich as big as the islands named after 'em, I prayed fervent that when they all met again they would form a friendly little League of Rations for the peace of the world and my Andy.

It was two o'clock in the morning when a guy that must of been the manager strolled over and jabbed Andy on the shoulder.

"Listen, folks," he began, shifting a chee-root to the other side of his facial gravity, "I don't wanta break up your little party and all that, but it's working on toward morning and the boys 'd like to have the chanst to mop up the place a little, preparing for a new day, as it were."

"You mean you want us to get out?" inquired Andy, dangerous and cool.

"You pronounced it, mister," smiled the man, bland. "Not that what we'd love to keep you with us and all that, but we're running a first class restaurant, not a one-night lodging house."

"Well, I've went and spent my good money here, whatever it is," growled Andy, though assembling his hat and gloves.

"Yah," scoffed the guy, peeling off the veneer of courtesy, "you come in here, spend a dollar and a half and think you can do the same with the night. Why don't you go to a hotel?"

"Why don't you go to—"

"Andy!" I calmed him. "The gentleman is right. We have dallied at dinner long enough." I drew on my gloves, broadcasting the menacing manager a sweet, if vague, molar revealer, and swept from the joint with dignity.

"Now what?" muttered Andy, still mad, as we emerged on Fifty-Ninth Street.

"Let's follow Columbus Circle and see where it goes to," I suggested with quiet carcasism, but it went over his head like a derby.

"Naw," he said, serious, "I think we ought to get a little rest—take that crab's advice and go to a hotel."

"Andrew Gibbons!"

"I mean different ones," he corrected himself, hasty. "You go your way and I'll go mine—and we'll meet for breakfast."

"I haven't any coin."

"Well, here's ten," he announced, slipping me an X. "And wait, you better have five more."

I backed off, horrified.

"I can't accept no money from you," I protested.

"Why not?"

"You may be my finances, but you ain't my husband."

"Then I'll *loan* it to you," he suggested, wily. "That's a safe proposition for you. By the time you're ready to pay I'll be your husband and you won't have to. How's that?"

"It don't listen right, somehow," I objected. "Mom has told me never to borrow what I can't pay back."

He scowled.

"That ain't no reason," he scorned.

"There *isn't* no good reason why you should turn down the first sensible proposition that I have offered—now, is there, Elsie?"

I studied the tips of my satin walking slippers.

"No-o," I remarked, slow. "I suppose they ain't no reason why I shouldn't trot to some nice hotel on money you loaned me—and yet— Oh, Andy," I burst out, uncontrollable, "it's just—that I want to be with you!"

"Honey, dear!"

A silence fell and nobody picked it up.

"Then we'll stick!" he finally exclaimed, triumphant. "We'll see this night through somehow and kill time if we have to do the same to ourselves."

I smiled comradely.

"But they's only two alternatives," he explained, rueful, "the park or the subway. Now which would you rather do, honey, park in the park or the dark?"

"Not the subway!" I hooted. "I don't feel like standing up for the mayor again to-night."

"But it wouldn't be crowded," explained Andy. "We'd have the whole car practically to ourselves."

"Ho, a private car!" I remarked laconic.

"And it 'd be all right if we could say 'Home, James!' But we can't. So I guess it's us for the big, wide, open spaces, Andy."

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE IN THE PARK.

WE diametered Columbus Circle and entered the leafy, light-strewn green of the park. They was nobody around, a wind blew cool from the east, combing the long grass on a little hill and bearing the restless roar of lions from the zoo. Overhead trees whispered to us as we passed and done a fantastic shawl dance in the light of the lamps.

We come to a bench and Andy give the order to break ranks and squat. I done so, and we set there, silent, looking straight ahead at the blackness on the other side of the stone walk—just plain, complete, absolute blackness with no redeeming ray of hope. And my heart was such.

After a while Andy felt for my hand and gripped it, desperate, like a drowning man would. And though it hurt, I didn't feel it beneath the bigger hurt in my soul.

The breeze blew from behind now, bringing the sweet cinnamon smell of a big bush, blossoming with yellow buds like dragon flies. And the fragrance crept deep down in my chest and swelled like a pain so that I had to do something or bust.

"Well, anyhow," I commented, sarcastic, "I can't say that you ditched me at the altar."

He didn't make no comeback at all, only sighed.

"Well, why don't you say something?" I growled.

"I love you," he obeyed me, sober.

I smiled and relaxed. After all, they is nothing so magic as them three simple words. A man could pelt his wife, bruise her, choke her and bully her, but if he said he done it because he loved her—she'd spend her afternoons gadding around among the neighbors telling 'em what a wonderful man she drew, how much he adored her and would do anything for and to her. But let him attempt pelting her with roses, bruising her with diamonds, choking her

with pearls and bullying her into accepting sables—without mentioning them three little words—and she'll be telling 'em out in Reno what a cruel and neglectful old Blue-beard she was anxious to be rid of.

So I snuggled closer to Andy, almost happy again, and he laughed and brushed his cheek against mine, but I pushed him away, kidding him.

"Nix on the cheek-to-cheek, old Knight of the Garter," I giggled, whilst stroking his stubby chin. "No nettle can touch me!"

He grinned and cuddled me cute. I buried my head, sighful, but raised it immediate. Somebody was standing over us, swinging a stick like a mad cat does its tail. It was another arm of the law.

Andy and me separated like oil and water.

"Listen here, bo," commenced the cop, menacing, "you can't pull this rough stuff out here this time of the morning. Unless you're anxious to get dragged in for spooning you'd better take the girl home and call it a day."

He strolled on, leaving Andy say the things he would like to of said in his presence.

"I'll call it a day all right," muttered Andy. "Some day! I got enough trouble on my hands now without no damn—"

"Andrew Gibbons!" I exclaimed. "That's a nice way to talk in front of your wife."

"Wife, is it?" sniffed Andy. "Say, if that ain't just like a woman! Try to reason 'em into doing something sensible and they remain Miss Elsie Marie Corbett, if you please. But get yourself in wrong and they immediate elect themselves the wife. Ha! Ha!"

In the flash of a second my stout right palm had painted his left cheek red. And at that same minute the cop strolled back on the return trip.

"For the love of liberty!" he breathed, heavy. "It isn't spooning I'll be pulling you in for, but assault and battery. Now, get, both of you, and don't let me see you here again. In other words, move on!"

I went, serene. Andy followed me, muttering but meek, while the cop watched our exit. We'd only made a couple yards when Andy turned.

"Say, listen, mister," he asked, respectful, "can I go back a minute?"

"What for?" snarled the officer.

Andy was flustered.

"Think I dropped something," he stutered.

"All right, but be quick about it."

Andy wandered back to the bench, his eyes on the ground, while I stood, impatient. He fumbled around in the grass for a couple minutes, then picked something up. It was his gardenia, the doggy, little old withered gardenia that had been so fresh and gay that morning. But he put it back on his lapel, gentle, and come to give me his arm like a bridegroom.

And so we strolled on, outta the glare of the lamp and the cop, down a little byway that led into darkness.

"Where does this road go, Andy?" I inquired, timid.

"This ain't no road, dear," he told me. "It's a bridle path."

"A bridal path!" sighed I. "Oh, Andy!"

We walked down it, slow, finally turning off into an open space bordered with bushes like the fringe of hair on a man's bald head.

"Flop," ordered Andy. "We camp here the rest of the night."

For a long while we set, watching a weird moon play light tunes on the soft fog that shimmered over the grass. And we didn't say nothing much, there being nothing to say. And in the bushes little hidden creatures moved—little creatures that was happy in their homes and each other.

"This is real nice, ain't it, Andy?" I observed, cheerful, after a spell of silent contemplation. "I never knew the parks was so pretty, did you?" Lookit the fog fingers come creeping over the ground like a bogymen. Now the moon's gone in. Look, Andy, ain't she the little devil, flirtin' behind her fan like that?"

"I don't see no fan," said prosy old Andy.

"It's the clouds," I explained, hushed. "A cloud fan of gray feathers tipped with silver. See, now she comes a-peeping out, coylike. I—I wonder what it's like now down to the—the Delaware Water Gap?"

Andy kissed my fingers, thoughtful, and

then looked up into my face, bending close.

"Don't, Andy," I begged. "Oh, Andy, don't kiss me. I couldn't bear it!"

He frowned and picked a long, dewy grass to chew. The moon had hid her face for good—frightened, I guess, at the weird shadows that sneaked through the creepy mist. It got cool, too, and Andy shivered.

"You're cold," I said, worried.

"I ain't," he denied.

"Well, what 're you doing, then?" I snapped. "Imitating Gilda Grey?"

"No," he said, weary, "but I feel like imitating Rip Van Winkle."

"And sleep for twenty years!" I laughed short. "Well, you won't find me waiting for you when you wake up, deary. I done my bit."

"Nagging me again," sighed Andy.

"I ain't nagging you!" I contradicted, savage. "I'm merely informing you you're cold."

"So's the north pole; but what 're you going to do about it?"

"You oughtn't to of wore that Palm Beach," I told him.

"Well, what did you want me to wear?" he growled like a cross bear. "Red flannel or a fur lined overcoat?"

"Don't try to be funny," I warned him. "You know your own limitations."

"Funny?" he echoed, scornful. "I don't have to *try*. The situation speaks for itself."

"And you rehearsed it," I mocked. "If you had come for me this morning when you should of— There you go shivering again. I know you're cold."

"You're not acting like no steam heater yourself," he remarked. "Where's your coat?"

"Over in Jersey with the rest of the things. Oh, Andy," I cried, a thought smiting me, "he must be waiting still!"

"Who waiting?"

"Pell Prendergast. He said he'd stay with my grips till we come."

"Who's he, and what's he doing with your stuff?"

I hesitated.

"Well, he—he used to like me a little,"

I explained, shy. "Oh, he's real nice, Andy, and I think it was sweet of him to bother like this, don't you?"

"Yeh, sweet as an unripe lemon," he growled. "Why didn't you let *me* tend to 'em, huh? Ain't I your future husband?"

"I know, Andy," I soothed; "but you see he—he wanted to. He'd do anything in the world for me."

"He would, would he?" snarled my boy friend, jealous as a Mexican hairless is of a St. Bernard. "Then tell him to pick you the cauliflower off Dempsey's left ear or bring you a bunch of forget-me-nots from the fist of Luis Angel. Yah!"

"Don't be so mean, Andy."

"Mean?" he exploded. "Say, it don't make no difference to me if your old sweetie wants to play porter. I'd merely like to hand him the tip that whoever horns in on my little parties usually ends up the goat. That's all—I only want him to comprenay that Andrew R. Gibbons is about as safe to play with as the third rail, the third degree, or the third party—see?"

"Three don't seem to be a lucky number with you," I observed, amused.

"When it comes to me and my girl," he announced, grim, "two's company and three's a funeral. That's all I got to tell this here Mr. Pinned-her-fast—"

"Prendergast," I corrected.

He jumped on me.

"If you're so crazy over the name, why didn't you take it?" he demanded.

I was enjoying myself. They ain't nothing so tickles a woman as savage male jealousy. I was just dopping out a cutting comeback when a raindrop plopped on my neck.

CHAPTER VII.

IT RAINETH AND SHINES AGAIN.

"ANDREW GIBBONS," I wailed, "is that rain?"

He spread a palm, careless. "I don't know," he remarked, cool. "Is it?"

"You know it is!" I snapped. "You've knowed it all along. You—you're just trying to postpone the rain like you done our wedding. Well, you can't get away with it." I was crying now, tears of dismal

despair. "T-turn up your collar," I ordered between sobs.

He done so, spilling a snowstorm of rice.

"Rice!" I choked. "Rice again! It's following us like a hoodoo."

We stumbled to our feet and groped through the rain curtain that wrapped itself around us in the lamplight like a robe of rainbow pearls—but cold, they was—like the bottom of the sea.

"I think they's a little summerhouse somewheres around," commented Andy, helping me to flee before the storm under his coat like *Paul* did *Virginia*.

"Charming!" I hissed, catching a driblet of rain off my nose. "There's nothing I like better on a wet four o'clock in the morning than to park beneath an arbor and inhale the fragrance of June roses. So romantic! Lead us to your summerhouse, Andy, and let's hope we won't be there when winter comes."

We stumbled around in the dark and wet and finally crossed the threshold of a little rustic pagoda. We entered and huddled on the round seat, forlorn.

"Now we're out of the wet," announced Andy, tickled with himself.

"Out of it!" I snickered, watching a miniature Niagara follow the run in my stocking. "We brung it right with us. Huh! it's like taking a high dive in the Hudson River with your best clothes on and then avoiding a mud puddle."

My water spouse tucked his coat closer around me.

"Poor little kid," he soothed. "I know you're wet and tired and mad, dear, but right now you're with the one guy in the world that 'd give his right arm for you—and his left."

"Honest?" I murmured, relentful, snuggling deeper down into them arms. "Oh, Andy," I whispered, mournful, "we're just like babes in the woods, ain't we? But where's the robins?"

"The Robins?" he laughed. "They don't hit New York till next week, honey. But it ought to be a good game."

"Better than the game of love, I hope."

"But the game of love is never played to a finish," he put in.

"Sometimes it is," I reminded him, cyn-ical.

"But ours ain't going to be," he de-clared.

"It ain't no time to talk about a finish," I snapped, "when we ain't even started."

"Honey, it kills me to hear you talk like this," he said, hurt.

"Kills you, does it?" I snarled. "Then I'm wearing the wrong color crape." I looked down at my drenched and dragged wedding gown. "A widow before I am a bride," I snickered.

The rain was pelting the leaves outside with a soft, uncertain sound like the pat-tering steps of a kiddie coming downstairs in the night. It was kinda lulling, too, and Andy's head sunk deeper on my shoulder. Then the rain stopped, and the cold, creep-ing mist give way to a clear gray light. It was almost morning."

"Go on, Andy," I encouraged. "Snooze a little. You're tired."

"You do, too," he whispered. "Lean against me, honey. Rest your head comfy."

"No, Andy," I refused, gentle, sitting erect. "I'm all right."

He grunted, drowsy, and burrowed his head against my knee. Then his breath come deeper and deeper. Once or twice he felt for my hand till he found it. Then he slept with his lips soft against it, con-tented as a baby.

So I set there, watching him, while the skies over us turned rosy. And in my heart come the feeling that now, if never before, I loved my Andy.

It ain't no test when you're strolling on your sweetie's arm down Broadway. It ain't no test when he makes love to you under the moon with an orchestra of ban-jos in the distance. The real test comes when he's laying unconscious, a cold sub-ject for speculation. For sleep is the pure, warm water that washes away whatever dis-guise he has put on—and you see him as he is.

And so I saw my Andy for the first time. And he wasn't handsome and he wasn't brave and he wasn't masterful—just Andy. But I loved him.

In another minute he would be conscious of a new day.

Hasty I got out my kit and repaired damages; and I chuckled to myself as I applied the good old schoolgirl complexion, thinking what a time I would be having forevermore trying to be the first one up in the morning so Andy could preserve his rosy illusions of me. Must every wife, I wonder, sleep with a vanity case under the pillow?

Snap! went the lid of Old Faithful, and I leaned back, to all appearances merely a sleeping beauty, but, like Pathé News, I "seen all, knowed all."

Andy was sitting up on one elbow and bending over me.

"Poor little tired kid," he whispered soft.

He stroked back my hair, gentle, and I could feel his eyes steady on me.

After a minute I let my lids flutter; then I sighed and opened them, misty.

"W-where am I, Andy?" I murmured.

"You been asleep, dear," he told me, "having a nice long rest."

"Have I?" I yawned, delicious. "What day is it, Andy?"

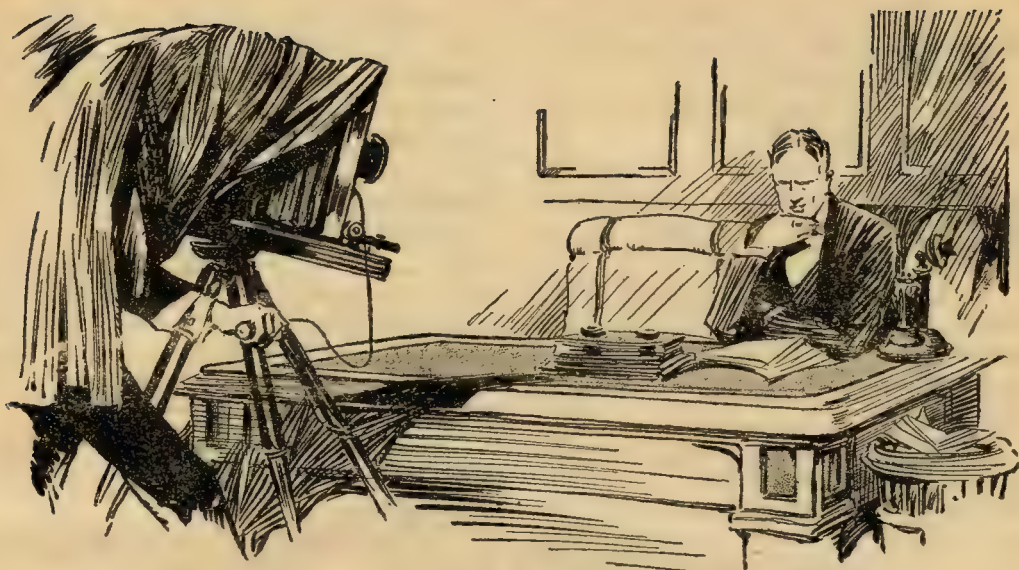
"June 13," he announced, a thrill in his voice. "The luckiest day in the year!"

The sun was beaming beautiful as we left the park and every shining bough sung "Here comes the bride!"

We got to the Municipal Building at half past seven, and set there, waiting, because Andy said he wasn't going to take no more chances. And so we was married. And the Delaware Water Gap was even more won-derful than I thought.

It's been a year.

Folks often asks me why it is my Andy and me has never had a cross word—never a fight to mar our marriage. And I smile, reminiscent, and answer soft: "It was that one awful day. Everything happened in that day that ever could happen. Fighting? We got that out of our system before we even stepped into the ring. And let me tell you, folks, no matter how gray the skies is—no matter how weary the waiting—they is always another train leaving for the Dela-ware Water Gap. All you got to do is get it."



Where She Belongs.

By **EDGAR FRANKLIN**

Author of "Where Was I?" "Regular People," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

SAMUEL B. HARKTON is decidedly complacent over the growing success of his wholesale hardware business; in fact, he is developing a prominent bump of conceit. His cousin, Tom Wilbur, head of the sales department, coming in to announce that he has almost clinched a million-dollar contract with Brink, Deane & Caswell, is somewhat irritated by Harkton's manner, and suggests that the fact that Harkton's wife, Helen, works in the research laboratory of the Scathmore Foundation, may be taken by the business world to indicate that Harkton himself can't make ends meet. Harkton blows up and asserts he will put an end to his wife's employment and make her remain home in Montvale with their children, Dolly and Sam. His wife, nevertheless, goes to work next day, and Harkton is further irritated by being informed, when he calls the Foundation, that Mrs. Harkton and one Rivers, a scientist, are locked in a laboratory and cannot be interrupted. Later the watchman tells him on the telephone that they have left, and that Rivers was carrying a traveling bag.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT SHE HAD DONE.

IT may be said that Thomas Wilbur reeled. This was something he did very rarely, because he was an unusually well-balanced, even a hardened, salesman. But he reeled this time.

"Sam!" he gasped. "I—I can't believe that! We—why, we've both known Helen ever since she was a little kid, Sam. If a

woman beyond suspicion ever lived, it's Helen! Why, she never even—"

"You needn't defend my wife for me," Mr. Harkton smiled bitterly. "I'm not even allowing myself to—to think an accusation yet, because I don't know. But I mean to know damned soon!"

He squared his shoulders, as befitted a strong man about to meet such a crisis. He laid aside his unlovely pipe—the good old pipe that had been smoked so many times

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in peaceful comfort, in that very room. Also, Mr. Harkton twitched down his vest and buttoned his coat.

"How much money have you with you, Tom?" he asked crisply.

"Eh? Oh, I'm carrying the wealth of the Indies to-night—about six hundred dollars. I drew that out in cash to-day because—"

"And I've got better than two hundred," Samuel muttered, after a quick glance into his billfold. "That'll keep us going until we can get more, if it's needed. Will you come with me?"

"Where?"

"I don't know anything more about that than you do!" Samuel said, vibrantly. "Until we catch up with them—that's all. They may—I don't say they have, because I *can't* believe it yet; but they may have taken a steamer or they may have taken a train for the west or the south or for Canada. And it may be a day or so before we pick up a clew as to where they have headed; but I'll pick it up and I'll go after them and I'll stay after them until I catch them!" cried Samuel Harkton. "Will you come?"

"I—yes, I think I will," Mr. Wilbur replied.

"Let's go!" said the outraged husband, with exceeding brevity, as he started for the hall and his hat and light overcoat. "We'll drive down to the city in your car and—"

Here, in the doorway, he stopped, verbally and literally. He winced, too, did Samuel, as he glanced up the empty stairway; drawn lines of suffering appeared on his countenance.

"The—the kids!" he said huskily. "I guess they're asleep."

"By this time, yes."

"I—I'd like to sneak up there and look at them, just once more," Samuel said brokenly, his yearning eyes still on the stairs. "But I don't dare take the chance of—of waking them and having to explain anything. Only—oh, Lord! I *would* like to see 'em just once more, Tom! It may be some time before I see them again, you know. It may be—never!"

"Well, but—"

"Because I'm going to kill that rat Rivers when I get him!" Mr. Harkton advised

his second cousin, and very convincingly, too. "I'm going to kill him, if I go to the chair for it! Once I get my fingers around his rotten throat, the devil himself'll never get 'em off, Tom! And it'll be too good for him! Heaven knows I never expected to have to face anything like this myself, but I've always had pretty clear views on the subject. I could forgive a professional criminal or a man who smashed a few laws in the heat of passion, but I've always felt that death was too kind for the sort of cold-blooded hell-hound that deliberately wrecks a home! I—well, come on!"

He snatched hat and coat. He waited impatiently as the slightly bewildered Thomas did likewise.

"You're going to tell the servants you're leaving, Sam?" the latter asked.

"I'm going to tell nobody anything! I'll phone from the city to Josephine and ask her to come and look after the kids. Do you want to phone Doris before we start?"

"No, I—I guess I'll phone Doris from the city, too," Mr. Wilbur said, somewhat confusedly and with swiftly growing anxiety. "Sam, I—I wish you'd just sort of sit down and count a hundred before we start. I mean, think it over and cool down a bit. You're pretty hot just now and likely to do almost anything rash without—"

"Yes! That's odd, isn't it?" Mr. Harkton cried. "Do you want to keep out of this mess or are you coming?"

"I'm—er—coming, of course. Only—"

"Come, then!" barked Samuel; and threw wide the door of his home and—no, he did not march out into the night, never to return until, hands all covered with human blood, the jury had pronounced the case one of justifiable homicide. Rather did Samuel halt his progress with a distinctly violent jerk, for to have continued one more yard at this rate would have been to knock headlong from the steps Mrs. Samuel herself!

She was indeed standing there, all alone and evidently on her way into the house, while down the curved drive a taxicab snorted and puffed away. She was, naturally enough, astonished at the sight of her husband; but clearly visible above her astonishment—and Thomas at least caught

this queer effect in the very first second—there was something oddly glorified and exalted about Helen! Her eyes shone, her lips were parted like those of an eager child. But there was a lot more than this to the indescribable new expression, Thomas sensed and wondered—and could not find the answer.

"Why, Sam!" gasped Sam's wife.

"*Hah!*" gurgled from Samuel's throat.

"What—what in the world—"

"You're home at last, are you?" came more dizzily from the same throat, and more furiously.

"Why, yes; I came up on the nine fifty-five. Sam, you weren't worried? I'm so sorry. I'd have been here ten minutes ago, but Freddy's front tire blew out, down by the drug store, and he had to stop and change, of course. The poor young one was so flustered, too! It was the first time it had ever happened when—"

"*Come in here!*" rasped and scraped from Samuel Harkton, as his forefinger indicated the corridor.

And now this nameless new expression of Helen's, Thomas observed, disappeared entirely, quite obliterated by amazement that was not unmingled with some little anger. Her eyes widened; her head came a little higher.

"Well, yes, that—that's what I meant to do, of course, Sam," she said. "What under the sun is the matter with you?"

"*Come!*" said Samuel, barely holding down the rage that was upon him.

He closed the outer door behind her. Again his big finger came up, indicating the way to his den.

"Now go in there!" said Samuel Harkton.

Just once, Helen glanced rather wild inquiry at Thomas. Thomas nodded quick, grave assent. Thomas also glanced at his hat, his coat and at the outer door and opened his lips to speak; but at the sight of the mighty Samuel looming above the frail Helen he seemed to change his mind. Thomas, also, moved sadly toward the den.

Samuel closed the door there, too. Chest heaving, eyes blazing, fists tight, he glowered at the mother of his children!

"Now!" he cried. "Where is he?"

"Where is—who, Sam?"

"Your friend! Your friend Rivers!"

Mrs. Harkton winked rapidly. She did not wink in what a reasonably calm man, perhaps, would have considered a suspicious manner. Rather, she winked confusedly and very prettily.

"Where is he?" she repeated. "I'm sure I don't know where he is. He's home, I suppose. Why?"

"Don't try that innocent stuff on me, Helen!" Samuel thundered. "Don't—"

"Don't do what?" Mrs. Harkton gasped; and then, as some faint realization seemed to come to her, she turned incredulously to Thomas Wilbur with: "He—he isn't being *jealous* of Jim Rivers, is he?"

"Well, I—tell you, Nell," Thomas began, most uneasily. "In a way—yes, I think he is. You see—"

More than this he did not say, for Mrs. Harkton's head had gone back; Mrs. Harkton, in fact, was emitting several peals of the most natural laughter. For some moments, its intensity quite shook her slender little body.

"Jealous—of Jim!" she cried. "Why—"

"You can't laugh it off, either!" her husband broke in savagely.

"I'm not trying to laugh anything off!" said Helen, and her merriment ended very abruptly.

"Helen, you listen to me!" ordered her husband, and the thick forefinger pointed straight at the lady. "You were locked up all day with that man, in a private room!"

"In the laboratory, do you mean?"

"Call it what you like," sneered Samuel, "you were locked up with him!"

Mrs. Harkton caught her breath. For one remarkable, flashing moment, the glorified expression returned, too.

"And do you know why?" she cried.

"I don't want to listen to any neat, ingenious explanations, if that's what you mean!" Samuel said roughly. "I—aha! Aha! You're blushing!"

"Well, at the sort of thing you're trying to imply, I think that any woman might blush!" Mrs. Harkton responded, quite fiercely. "You dare—"

"Wait! That's not all I know, by a long shot!" Samuel laughed wickedly. "You

left that rotten den to-night with Rivers, and Rivers carried a traveling bag!"

"A—a trav—" Helen stammered, and for a moment pressed a fine little hand to her forehead. "He—yes, that's so; he did have a bag. He had the big bag he carries his pet microscope in, of course; he never leaves that in the laboratory. But that you—"

"*Microscope!*" Samuel echoed tremendously. "Microscope—bah! You hurried out with him; you were on your way—well, never mind that! You're here now! You're here where I can talk to you, and hereafter you'll stay here, my dear! D'ye hear that? *This* is the end of your scientific rot, Helen! From now on, you'll stay where you belong and no damned—"

"Samuel! *Stop!*" Mrs. Harkton said, with such remarkable force and with eye so compelling that Samuel found himself stopping, without having known any real volition in that direction. He stopped, indeed, with mouth and eyes open, the latter being fixed upon his wife in a sort of fishy fury.

"I don't know what has happened to you," Mrs. Harkton said, crisply. "I know you don't drink, so that I think you must have gone mad! Yes, I think you're quite crazy, Sam! I—I suppose that you were anxious about me, being late and all that; and if that's what's the matter with you, I'm sorry. But the fact that a woman misses one train really isn't conclusive proof that her moral fiber has been shattered and that she is definitely committed to a life of immorality!"

"Well—that's all right! But—" Samuel essayed, somewhat groggily.

"I'll endure it this time and stay, because, as I say, I think you're temporarily demented. But I *will not* endure any more of it! Do you quite understand? To-morrow morning, if you are yourself again, we will forget this. And if you're not yourself, I shall take the children and leave; and I shall send on to Boston for your father and your brother and have them put you in the care of an alienist! Don't follow me, please, and—good night!" said Mrs. Harkton, and swept past her husband and to the door and through the door.

Half a minute, Samuel stood quite motionless, apparently in a state of partial paralysis. Then he straightened up and cleared his throat and looked, not too impressively, at his second cousin.

"I guess I—er—said about the right thing?" he mumbled.

"If you're asking me, you made a blooming ass of yourself!" Mr. Wilbur replied with entire candor.

"Do you think I—I overdid it?"

"Well, you bawled at Nell as if she were some drab from the tenements, some rotten little rat not even entitled to a chance to explain, if you consider that overdoing it!"

"Well, I—I was excited, of course. I was suffering a mighty sharp reaction!" Samuel said, with some indignation. "Man gets pretty well wrought up, having his wife disappear like that, you know. Why, when—when I saw her there on the steps, Tom, I simply went all to pieces inside! It's possible that I may have lost a little self-control for a moment I was so devilish relieved that—"

"Yes, every word you uttered showed that," Mr. Wilbur grunted, and himself turned toward the door.

"All the same, I believe I've taken a step in the right direction," Helen's husband announced doggedly.

"You do? That's good. I'm glad you do. Good night, Sam."

"Eh? Oh, sit down and smoke a while!"

"Nope. Have to get back. Doris 'll be expecting me," said Mr. Wilbur, but he paused again, struck by a thought. He smiled perplexedly. "I say, though, Sam; there *was* something queer about Nell—when she first came in."

"Hey? You think—"

"No, I don't think the sort of thing you've been thinking," the head of the sales department snapped. "There was a—a look to her, I didn't understand at all; I've never seen any one just like that before. She was sort of exalted and all tickled to death with herself, as if—well, I don't know how to describe it, but it was there!"

"I noticed something like that, too," Samuel confessed. "Sit down and—"

"Not on your life!" said Mr. Wilbur, and moved on again. "There's going to be

a grand old family row in this house before morning and I don't want to be mixed up in it. Good night!"

He was pleasantly wrong about that, however. There was no family row. In fact, had one searched Montvale from end to end that night, one could not have found a quieter house.

Upstairs, for a little, Samuel heard his really beloved wife moving around; then there was complete stillness; and when he had sucked aimlessly on his pipe for another period Samuel locked up the house—for some queer reason with not nearly the usual amount of tramping around and rattling bolts—and also retired.

And comfortably tucked in his little bed, with a paper and a book handy, he regained much of his accustomed calm and of his more valued self-esteem. He had, after all, done the right thing. In a case like this, not amenable to gentle treatment apparently, a certain amount of roughness was necessary; if there had been a shade too much in this instance, there was excuse aplenty. No man virtually convinced that his wife has eloped with a fellow scientist can be quite himself, nor should this be expected of any man. Never before had Samuel known even the suspicion of that kind of shock; perhaps it should have cleared his vision and blessed him with a certain new humility toward Helen. For some reason it did nothing of the sort.

He was calm now. He was honestly sorry for the ghastly things that he had said. To-morrow morning he would apologize—without, of course, being too effusive about it and being quite prepared to call to Helen's attention his justification, should that seem judicious. He—oh, yes, he'd have to square things with the poor little kid.

But—the fact remained that now, beyond any peradventure, Helen knew his sentiments and knew that her scientific career had ended! She knew that henceforth her place would be right here in the home! Or possibly she didn't know it yet; she was fighting it out in there, all alone, and the fight might take all night—but, by thunder, when it was over Samuel would have won!

His sixth sense told him these things. Being neglectful in some particulars, however, his sixth sense failed to advise him of the peculiar moment that was to come just before he reached up to turn out the light.

In the door between their rooms, the lock clicked back. He started up and smiled. So she was coming in, even now, to tell him that there was one leader in this family—and one little housewife! Aye, she was standing there in her funny little silk pyjamas. She had been crying.

"Oh, I—I wanted so to tell you!" she cried. "It—it's so wonderful! It has—has seven distinct isotopes and—"

Here Samuel began to rise, and as he did so his wife darted back into her own domain, a woman whose tortured mind had changed all in a twinkling!

"No! No, I won't tell you!" she said shrilly. "I won't! I—don't you dare touch me! Don't you dare come near me!"

And the door slammed and the lock clicked again, and Samuel sat back and rubbed his chin. She was having the devil's own time with her fight! She was plain hysterical and raving about her science, apparently. It might be better to insist on going in there and soothing her and—no! it might not! It might be the worst possible thing to do. Because, if she threshed it out in her own way the whole fool business would be settled for good, whereas if he began to meddle at this juncture—

Samuel turned out the light and sighed heavily and settled down.

But the sighing—which was, of course, an indication of dangerous weakness—was all gone in the morning. Samuel arose very much his own man—very much indeed the dominant being that was Harkton, Inc! Downstairs, he caught the sound of Helen's voice. He opened his door an inch and listened; and then he smiled complacently. She was talking to Anna and telling her to get potatoes and onions to-day when the man came; so she had *not* gone down to the city and she *was* applying her scientific mind to household problems! Ah, yes, and now she was telling Anna that breakfast might as well wait another few minutes for Mr. Harkton. Aha! Samuel chuckled as he dressed.

As a rule he had small tolerance for acting and artificiality in the home circle, but on this occasion ordinary caution suggested that he might well give a little consideration to his mien. Hence Samuel descended with just the right amount of penitence in his smile and still with just the right amount of dignity. He permitted the penitence to increase a little as his eyes rested upon Helen, in her place at the table. He walked directly to her.

"Nell, dear," said he, "I want to—to beg your forgiveness for all the rot I talked last night. You see, I telephoned and got the night watchman at that da—at the Scathmore outfit and—"

Mrs. Harkton placed one little hand on his lips and smiled faintly.

"All right, Sam. I know. I should have phoned home when I missed the eight thirty-one. Sit down. Your grape-fruit will be all warmed through."

And now Samuel kissed his wife, and it seemed to him that the response was somewhat lacking in real warmth. Well, everything considered, that wasn't astonishing. On the other hand, it wasn't a detail that might safely be commented upon or even noticed. Samuel strolled to his own place—inquired as to the children and learned that they had already started for school—stated in answer to a question accompanied by a very odd smile that, no, he had not heard them shouting—glanced at his paper, neatly folded as usual beside his plate—and suddenly, as he was about to pick up his spoon, realized just what made Mrs. Harkton look so unusual this morning.

"Nell! Why the funny make-up?" he asked.

"The funny make-up?" Helen repeated, raising her brows.

"Your hair! What have you got it all pulled back like that for?" Samuel laughed. "Why didn't you fix it—ah—ah—fuzzy, as you always do? It's pretty that way."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Harkton.

"And you've got those confounded horn-rimmed glasses on, too!" the head of the house observed. "What's that for? Dodson said you could drop all glasses, didn't he? You haven't had a pair on for months."

"I find they rest my eyes," said Helen, in the same distant voice, which was more than anything else like the trickle of ice water.

"Well, they make you look like the dickens!" Samuel said flatly. "They make you look like some infernal school teacher or highbrow, Nell!"

"Yes?" said Mrs. Harkton.

Her husband stared. Still offended, eh? Or *was* that it? No, after a moment of staring, he'd be hanged if he thought that was it! Helen, whose cunning little opinion of herself should this morning have been compressed to properly small dimensions, looked rather as if the same opinion had expanded vastly overnight! Yes, to admit the thing secretly, she looked just as Samuel felt, now and then, when he had accomplished something particularly big and satisfactory!

She smiled at him—yes, *condescendingly*! She smiled as if somewhat bored!

"Aren't you going to read your paper?" she asked, and shaded a yawn.

"I—yes! I might about as well!" snapped Samuel Harkton, and opened it with a swish.

Which, to be sure, he might, and that with a comfortable mind. Because, sulk as much as she chose, Nellie was again in her own home! She wasn't racing for an early train or riding on one—she wasn't mooning about an accursed laboratory with an accursed assistant—she wasn't doing a solitary thing this bright, pleasant morning that she shouldn't have been doing. Nellie was right there at the breakfast table—right where she belonged and the same old Nellie from this day onward to the end of Time!

So Samuel smiled as he spread his sheet, smiled blandly, and then ceased his smiling. Twice he blinked. Then he closed his eyes tightly—and then, after a second, opened them again. And it was still there, the very excellent picture of Helen herself, on the front page—still there and staring back at him.

Nor was this all, by any manner of means.

Samuel's favorite sheet ran to somewhat florid headlines. He liked them because they communicated much information

quickly—but never before had they furnished him with quite so much information as this morning, for

DR. HELEN HARKTON ROCKS SCIENTIFIC WORLD BY DISCOVERY OF NEW ELEMENT!!!

crashed past his eye-balls and into his brain; and as if this were not enough the subhead advised him that

FOREMOST WOMAN SCIENTIST WINS \$50,000 SCATHMORE PRIZE

CHAPTER VI.

DR. HARKTON.

AFTER all, Samuel was a business man. When thirty thrilling seconds had passed, when his cheek had whitened and his breathing had become jerky and irregular, his first audible observation was: "Fifty—wins *what*? Wins fifty thousand dollars?"

Mrs. Harkton pushed back the hair above her right ear and smiled, faintly.

"Why, yes. That's the Scathmore prize, awarded every ten years, you know, for the most important scientific discovery of the decade."

"And you—you won this prize?"

"So they say, Sam."

"You—you won fifty thousand dollars, Nell?" Samuel mouthed on, quite senselessly.

Mrs. Harkton nodded tolerantly, yet with a hint of impatience.

"It's not paid yet, if that's what you mean. It will not be for several weeks, I believe. It—why, it's unimportant in any case, isn't it? I mean, as compared with the thing itself?"

"It—yes, I suppose so," Samuel muttered dazedly.

His wife smiled faintly, perfunctorily, in the same patient, superior way, and re-adjusted her horn-rimmed glasses. Samuel's own bewildered eyes gathered a faint impression: latterly it had been suggested that, in the vulgar phrase, his capable head had taken to swelling. Maybe it had; maybe it hadn't; but this morning Helen seemed

to be suffering the same trouble, and that in a much more marked degree.

Vague indignation rose warmly within Samuel—and cooled instantly, for the impossible newspaper was dragging at his attention.

"It was officially announced yesterday afternoon by Dr. Charles Reening, head of the Research Department of the Scathmore Foundation, that his associate, Dr. Helen Harkton, after many months of the most complicated and involved labor, had definitely isolated and identified a new element which—"

"Toast, Sam?" his wife asked dutifully, as she extended it.

"Uh—yes—thanks!" mumbled Harkton, Inc., and fumbled for it and found that his bewildered eye had passed to:

"—of such immeasurable importance, both from a purely scientific standpoint and because of its possible endless industrial applications, as Dr. Harkton's epoch-making discovery, the board of trustees, which also constitutes the Scathmore Foundation Board of Awards, agreed unanimously that the decade's fifty-thousand-dollar prize should be awarded Dr. Helen Harkton.

"The element has been named Nellium, and—"

"Nellium?" Samuel echoed.

"They—er—decided to call it that," Helen smiled modestly.

"Why?"

"After me, of course."

"Huh? Why not—why not 'Helenium,' then?"

"Too much like helium, Sam."

"Well, that's all right, too; I don't know anything about helium, and I don't know anything about naming elements; but this—this 'Nellium' stuff is too intimate and informal. Who gave it that name? You?"

"I? No."

"It wasn't Reening?"

"No, it wasn't Dr. Reening."

"So it was this man Rivers, eh?"

"Yes, I believe he did suggest it."

"Well, that's precisely what I thought!" said Samuel Harkton. "And I think we'll have that changed over to something else."

I allow no man to go around tacking my wife's pet name on any da—"

"Sam!" said Dr. Harkton; and the word was like a pistol shot.

"What?"

"Last night I told you precisely what I meant to do if we had any more of this nonsense. I assumed that the subject was closed. It *will* be closed within a few moments, one way or the other. Now, do you really doubt me, or do you not?"

"I—no, of course I don't, Nellie," Samuel said, and flushed. "You know that. But at the same time—"

"Then let me say just this, Sam: I cannot—no, really, I *cannot*—permit any utterly childish jealousy on your part to interfere with my work. Until yesterday I tried to keep it even out of our conversation, because I know that you are not interested, and I, as a matter of fact, had accomplished nothing remarkable. But now I *have* accomplished something, Sam—something of real importance. I am very happy. I should have liked to share that happiness with you, or let you share it with me. Instead, you endeavor to heap your cheap abuse on me and—well, so be it. But *this* is the end of your cheap abuse. Do you understand that?"

In a brighter, better state than our present one, stringent laws will be passed, making compulsory the erection of large, prominent warning signs at the crucial point of every situation, domestic or otherwise, just as railroad crossings and dangerous curves and deadly drugs are marked nowadays.

Just now, for example, he might have worked happy wonders by stepping around the table and gathering into his great arms this new, incredible wife, and then laughing boisterously over her and petting her, and so summoning back the older wife he loved so dearly. Or even last night—he might have bounced out of bed and caught Nellie and held her close and allowed her to cry it out and— Well, he had not done that, had he? Last night he had been an iron disciplinarian of an unruly female of no more consequence than any other female. And just now he'd be hanged if he'd go over there and try to make his peace

with the strange, uppish being who sat in his wife's place! He—that is, he—he—

"I understand!" he said gruffly.

But he could have made no statement more remote from the truth. In point of fact, at this strange moment, he seemed unable to understand anything at all. The blow had come too suddenly upon his household.

This scientific tommyrot of Helen's he had always regarded as a harmless freak, of course. It was something which had appealed to her active little mind in college days, and more recently with young Samuel out of the baby stage, had popped up again to take the place of mothers' meetings and prepared foods, in the same active little mind. Latterly its consequences, in the shape of her absence from the home, had begun to annoy him; and only a day or two ago he seemed to remember, he had determined to put an end to it, and at the time he had considered that no formidable task. That it might be of the slightest importance in any way had never even occurred to him.

And yet now—now they were calling her "Dr. Harkton," and printing columns about her, and handing her money in fifty-thousand-dollar lots and—"

"Yesterday," said Dr. Harkton meditatively, in an uncannily cool, even voice, "they came trooping up to the laboratory to cheer. They—they went quite wild for a time, and my hand was almost shaken off before they'd finished the informal reception. Some of the big men came in from two or three universities before night, and they—they came to learn, from *me*! And *you* never even congratulated me!"

"Eh? Well, they probably knew it was coming and knew what it—it was all about," Samuel said dizzily. "I didn't, you see. You never hinted to me that you were getting ready to pull anything as stupendous as the papers seem to think this is, Nell, but—why, I do congratulate you, kid!"

Unsmilingly, Dr. Harkton raised a hand of protest. It seemed almost that she shuddered delicately.

"Oh, not now, Sam—please! It's too late now!" she said.

"Why, no, it's not—I *do* congratulate you, Nellie. I think it's fine. I think it's great," said Samuel; for after all, despite his faults and his egotism, he was a big man—he was the splendid type of man that can forgive his wife even the discovering of a new element.

"Tell me all about this element," he ended heartily.

"About how we—how I came to discover it, do you mean?" Dr. Harkton asked.

"Yes."

"But you'd never understand, Sam."

"I certainly would!" said Mr. Harkton. "I'm at least as bright as most of the people who read this paper—and apparently it's assumed that they're able to understand. Give us the inside story, Nell!"

"Well, then"—Mrs. Harkton hesitated dubiously—"it began, I suppose, when I finally determined that the atomic structure—"

"The what?"

"The atomic structure of tellurium was—"

"Of *what*, Nellie?" escaped Samuel.

"Of tellurium. When I determined that it wasn't at all what we had assumed it to be according to the accepted hypothesis of— Oh, you *don't* understand!"

"Well, maybe I don't, thoroughly, off-hand like this. I can't pile up a scientific education in fifteen seconds, Nellie, particularly when all this front page stuff about you has knocked me as cold as it has!" Samuel submitted rather desperately. "At the same time, I'm not defective mentally."

"Nobody suggested that you were, Sam," his wife smiled, with elevated kindness. "Only let's not try this."

"Why not? I'm not a scientist—no. But—but—"

Mrs. Harkton was considering him fixedly, strangely. Perhaps it was within her heart to punish Samuel for his shameful exhibition of the night before; or it is equally possible that her next remark reflected truly her innermost mind. At any rate:

"No, you're not, Sam—naturally, temperamentally, I mean. You're—er—in the hardware business," said she.

"Hey?"

"Just in the hardware business," sighed Dr. Harkton.

"Well, what the Sam Hill's the matter with the hardware business, that you have to sneer at it like that?" Mr. Harkton demanded violently. "It's been furnishing this family with three squares a day for a good many years, hasn't it? It built this house and stuck a dog-goned fine little bundle of gilt-edged securities in our safe-deposit box, didn't it? Well, then?"

Dr. Harkton had started back, almost in fright. She had raised her hand again, in that same regal protest—a brand-new trick that, by the way, and one which irritated Samuel intensely.

"Oh, Sam! Please! I wasn't sneering," Dr. Harkton smiled. "I was just suggesting that hardware doesn't necessarily equip one for an understanding of research work, and—oh, we needn't be absurd, need we?"

"I—I don't know any reason why we should be absurd," Samuel said blankly.

He tried to read his paper again; he found himself gazing covertly at his wife. She—she didn't look like the sort of woman who would go out and, without a word of warning to her family, discover a new element. Even with her hair pulled back like that and her owl-glasses and all the fool gestures and airs she was assuming this morning, she looked much like the Nellie Harkton who was the mother of his children and one of the most popular young matrons of Montvale.

And she was, of course. She—why, how the devil could she be anything else? This swell-headed effect was mainly in Samuel's fevered imagination; the fault, then, was mostly Samuel's own. Small wonder, to be sure, in view of the shock he had received; but at the same time, unless he wished a genuine gap to come between them and to widen—Heaven alone knew how far!—it behooved Samuel to get back to the natural.

"Neil," said he genially.

"Yes, Sam? Yes?" said Dr. Harkton, and came out of a brief fit of knit-browed, frowning abstraction.

"Frankly, you know—as between man and wife, kid—what *is* an element?"

Dr. Harkton started—winced—gazed incredulously at her husband. Had he suggested that she go forth and rob a bank she must have looked at him rather like this.

"Honestly, you *don't know*?" she asked.

"Honestly, Nell, if an element came up here beside the table and licked my hand, I'd never know it was an element," Harkton, Inc., confessed, with a rather sad grin. "I'd probably mistake it for Fido—or something like that. So don't be selfish and keep all this to yourself. What is an element?"

Dr. Harkton sighed and dropped her napkin.

"Well—it is the simplest form of matter, Sam."

"The simplest form of matter—sure! Like—for instance?"

"Oh, like—like oxygen or hydrogen or—or iron or copper—a form that can't be broken up into anything else or— *Do* you know what I mean?"

"Well, I ought to know something about iron and copper, Nell; I've handled tons enough of them," Samuel smiled, and for a moment his toes clutched at a safe ledge. "Go on."

"Well, there are eighty odd elements, Sam, that have been discovered during the last four or five centuries—and Nellium is the newest one. That's really all."

She nodded and smiled, just as kindly, and sipped the last of her coffee. Samuel waited several seconds.

"Aha?" he said encouragingly. "And now you've got it, what do you do with it, Nell?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. What good is the stuff? I may not know chemistry or physics, but I know nobody's handing anybody else fifty thousand cold smackers for discovering something that's of no use," Samuel grinned. "Can you make it pull a truck, honey, or do you chuck a handful of it under a boiler and get up a head of steam—or what?"

Dr. Harkton stiffened, almost disgustedly.

"Oh, you're trying to be humorous!" she murmured.

"I'm not! I only—"

"But you are—and you're not succeeding," Dr. Harkton said coldly, and her lips tightened.

Again they had reached a standstill! Samuel stared on at his wife, in the same blank, rather senseless and uncomprehending fashion. He—he—confound it—he did not believe she'd ever discovered—whatever it was! She was too pretty, in her ordinary state too much the little suburban wife, to be discovering things like that! Further, women who did that sort of discovering were always angular and unattractive, if not actually blowzy, Samuel fancied hazily. If they were not, they ought to be, and—no, he did *not* believe it! And still, as his gaze wandered back to the paper, there was the signed statement of Dr. James Bowden Comyss:

"If the data so far accessible upon this discovery are accurate—and the source from which they come leaves very little doubt upon that score—its importance can hardly be exaggerated. What the scope of its commercial application may be eventually, one can hardly predict; but upon the superficial facts alone it is perfectly safe to say that the finding of Nellium constitutes probably the greatest single achievement in science, not only of the decade but of the century."

And that was James Bowden Comyss saying that—Comyss, the biggest and most eminent scientist of them all, saying it about something Samuel Harkton's wife had done.

An instant he seemed to feel himself shrinking. He looked at his wife and thrilled with a strange, timid pride. And this new Helen looked at Samuel from half closed, thoughtful eyes, and the thrill died suddenly and hot, unreasoning fury welled up in its place—and that died, too, and Samuel, shaken, smiled shakily.

For the first time in history he, the conversationalist of the family, seemed to find nothing to say. He searched swiftly; he discovered that he could find nothing to say while Nellie stared at him with that—that infernally contemptuous smile. Yes, according to Samuel's belief, it was just that! And then again, he'd be hanged if he'd allow anybody's smile to render him dumb.

So he stretched his legs beneath the table with exaggerated unconcern and nodded slowly and himself smiled once more—and found something to say.

"Well, anyway, Nellie," he said amiably, "you wound up your scientific career in a blaze of glory, didn't you?"

"I did what?" Dr. Harkton asked quickly.

"I say, you finished your scientific career in a blaze of glory."

"Finished it?" Dr. Harkton cried. "Why, I've just begun it!"

Samuel sat up suddenly. They seemed to be coming back to solid ground.

"Oh, now, see here, Nellie," said he, "enough of a thing is enough. You know how I feel about your being outside the house so much. I'm entitled to some consideration, even if I don't go around discovering elements and things. Of course I have no objection to your tinkering at that sort of stuff around the home. For that matter, whatever you want fixed up in the way of a laboratory I'll have fixed up in the attic. But as for any more of this chasing down to the city every day—nix!"

Dr. Harkton was gazing at him with as much amazement as she might have gazed at even another new element.

"Why, you're—you're incredible!" she breathed.

"Maybe so, my dear, but—"

"It isn't possible, Sam that even *you* fancy that I might abandon my work, might sacrifice everything—my own inclination, the good I may be able to do the world, *everything*—solely because you—oh, but that isn't possible, of course," Dr. Harkton laughed.

And at the sound of this laugh, which tinkled down from some rare spot millions of miles above his own personal sphere, a strange and nameless weakness came upon Samuel.

He essayed a stern frown; no failure could have been more absolute.

"Well, that—that stand's all right in one way," he submitted weakly, "but at the same time you owe something to—"

"Oh! There's Jo!" cried the doctor of philosophy, and sped from the table,

There, indeed, seemed to be Jo. Samuel gazed numbly in her direction, saw her enter flushed and with shining eyes—saw her dash upon her elder sister and infold her in her arms as she cried:

"Oh, Nell! It's wonderful! *You're* wonderful—you're marvelous!"

Dr. Harkton, doubtless, responded appropriately. Samuel did not hear. Samuel was trying to think. He had not established his authority as head of the house; that was one point beyond dispute. Something had happened to that authority and to himself—he seemed to have been picked up by some invisible force and simply swept into the background—and unfamiliar as this particular location was to Samuel Harkton, he seemed unable to struggle to the fore again.

For the moment, that was to say. As he breathed heavily, he knew that within a few minutes he would be quite himself again.

He rose impressively—he noted that both sisters had vanished toward the door of the home and that the door was opening now and people were talking.

Then Dr. Harkton, buttoning her long, plain coat, came toward him again.

"Sam, Jo will look after the children—I mean she brought her things this time and she'll sleep here."

"Well, aren't—aren't *you* figuring on sleeping here?" Samuel gasped.

"For two or three days, I don't know, Sam," Helen smiled kindly. "You don't appreciate it, of course, but I've started a perfectly terrific excitement in our little circle, and that sort of thing has its responsibilities, which I can't very well evade."

"Well—certainly! But that has nothing to do with your sleeping—"

"I've prepared one paper, and last night I almost finished dictating the other to the girl at the Foundation, and she'll have it ready for me this morning," Dr. Harkton hurried along. "Those will have to be given out for publication, and there are two rival societies—each of them wants me to read my paper before it first, you know—and there are—oh, a thousand and one other things that—"

"Nell, dear!" Josephine put in, quite ignoring Samuel's existence.

"Yes?"

"Your important friend out there with the whiskers and the thick eyeglasses says he promised Professor Landburg that you'd give him a ten-minute interview this morning before he sailed for Europe—and time is moving on."

"All right; I'll be there immediately. You tell them, dear," Mrs. Harkton dimpled. "So, Sam, I'll try to get home to-night, but I can't promise a thing—really. If I don't turn up, don't worry. I'll phone if I have a chance, but I may not have a chance, and—goodby!"

She turned. But that Samuel gripped her, she would have sped away.

"Well, wait!" he choked. "Who's this—who's your important friend and—"

"Oh, why, Dr. Stenweld, of course—yes, *the* Dr. Stenweld, Sam. He insisted on driving over this way and stopping for me this morning; that's why I didn't go down on the train, you know. We're to see Professor Landburg before he sails, and—oh, Sam, I wish you wouldn't muss me like that, and I wish you wouldn't detain me."

She wrenched herself free and started for the door.

Samuel gulped down an astonishing assortment of emotions.

"Well—*hey!* When *are* you coming home?" he shouted.

"I've just told you, I don't know, and—oh, what does it matter now?" Dr. Harkton cried impatiently, gayly, almost, as she opened the door.

And with these brutal words the heartless woman rushed from her home; and, outside there was the chugging of a motor and the faint rasping of gears. Samuel tottered after her, and somehow finally came to the steps. Just curving out of the drive, turning now into the street and speeding away, was a fine, big closed car.

He mumbled savagely in the general direction of its receding rear. He gazed quite stupidly after it—and presently he gazed at that dusty empty spot, far away, where it had turned another corner.

Faintly, weakly, he groaned. In more

senses than one, she who had so recently been the wife of his bosom was simply *gone!*

CHAPTER VII.

DR. HARKTON'S HUSBAND.

JOSEPHINE took singing lessons.

Without due cause or proper advance notification, she had a maddening way of bursting into scales. They were not particularly good scales, and if one happened to be nervous their effect was much like that of sandpaper on a fresh burn. Just now, being glad of heart over the matter of her sister, Josephine began with her highest C and trilled more or less gloriously downward—and the queer thing is that, as he stared at her blackly, Samuel Harkton did not even hear.

Josephine, noting this blackness, stopped, gazed inquiry, and then smiled beamingly upon her brother-in-law.

"Well, this is a heluva note, isn't it?" Samuel demanded.

Josephine shrank.

"Oh, you're coarse!" she said.

"Coarse be—hanged!" Mr. Harkton responded hotly. "Who wouldn't be coarse, with a wife gone crazy like this and abandoning her—"

"You, of all people, ought to be simply bursting with pride over Nell! You ought to get down on your knees and thank your lucky stars for having married the most wonderful woman of the whole age," said Josephine, and turned disgustedly toward the stairs. "And instead of that, you're in a temper! Why, you're—you're ridiculous!"

"I am, eh? Well, what is it that makes me so ridiculous all of a sudden?" Samuel demanded more hotly as he shuffled after her. "Is a man ridiculous because he does not throw up his hat about his wife's leaving her home and her children? I wasn't ridiculous yesterday or last week or—"

"Well, you are now!" his sister-in-law advised him as she ascended.

Then, just as she reached the top of the flight, just as Samuel was on the very

verge of bursting into an unjustified tirade which he must have regretted, Josephine cleft the stillness of the upper floor with a new scale.

So Samuel Harkton turned away, his teeth grinding, and returned to the dining room and thrust his hands into his pockets and glared at the far too prominent oil study of a pineapple and three bananas, done by a maiden aunt whose subsequent decease had somehow rendered its removal vaguely indelicate and lacking in respect. And then, he it said, Samuel did laugh, although not boisterously.

In all probability Josephine was right. He did seem to be making rather an ass of himself, although excuses were not far to seek. This, of course, was the first time that Samuel's little wife had ever discovered an element, and it had come as a considerable shock. Later on—when, say, she had discovered three or four more new elements—he would become accustomed to the idea. Indeed, the time might even arrive when Samuel, glancing up from his morning paper, would say: "Well, well, my dear! So you have discovered still another element, eh? Well, that's splendid!" with perfect sincerity and good feeling all around.

Only even as yet, in this initial instance, he still knew himself to be greatly shaken and—Great Scott!—Was that clock right? Samuel crashed back to his normal morning: he had not only missed his regular train to the city, but if he meant to catch the one after that he'd have to do a mighty smart bit of walking. Very briefly indeed Samuel considered bidding farewell to his sister-in-law; he dispensed with this decent bit of courtesy and slammed the door of his home behind him; then he walked, and as he walked he grew much calmer, much more himself; when he reached the station he was even smiling in his own complacent way.

So Chivers went down on this train, did he? And March and Ludbridge? Chivers hurried forward with hand outstretched.

"Well, by golly, Sam!" he cried. "I certainly congratulate you!"

"Me?" said Samuel easily enough.

"Well, I should say so—on having a wife like that!"

"Oh, yes!" smiled Samuel.

"You don't look a bit puffed up about it, either," Chivers observed curiously, as he dropped the hand.

"I'm not," Samuel managed to grin, with entire truth.

There the conversation ended, and Chivers rejoined his neighbor, and Samuel walked apart. Just why he should be conscious of this distinctly ruffled feeling he could not say; doubtless it was because he had always detested Chivers. He kept on walking, to the very end of the platform; and here stood a little group of Montvale dwellers with whom he was not acquainted.

But they seemed to know Samuel. They hushed oddly, as he approached, and they stared, carefully looking away as he eyed them. Samuel presented his back for their inspection and turned his paper to the financial section; and behind him there was a very faint whispering, and he caught:

"Yes, that's him! That's Dr. Harkton's husband."

Samuel scowled suddenly. That was the pretty sentiment that Chivers had not voiced in so many words, wasn't it? That, perchance, was the first thought that came to anybody, when looking upon himself this morning—Dr. Harkton's husband. Not Samuel Harkton, the head of Harkton, Inc., but just Dr. Harkton's husband.

All right, then! What of it? Samuel smoothed out his scowl and gave thanks for the approaching train, even as a little shudder ran down his spine. They were beginning to whisper again back there.

Never partial to travel in the malodorous smoker, he made straight for that car this morning and took the very last seat, spreading his paper widely before him and so retiring from the world. He wished to think, keenly, dispassionately, effectively, as had so long been his wont; and there was something mightily reassuring about the realization that he had actually been able to plunge into the task, even before the wheels began to turn.

Primarily, then, he had suffered a sort of domestic shell-shock from which he was now recovering. Primarily—not to mince matters at all—his smug little ego had

received a severe jolt; and it was entirely possible that the said jolt had been coming to the said ego, so to speak, because for some time Samuel had been growing more and more appreciative of Samuel and less and less conscious that there were a few other people still alive. All this he admitted; and having admitted it, he felt much better and knew quite a righteous warmth.

So that was that, and accounted for some of the peculiar disturbance, but not for all of it, by any means.

Nellie, hitherto merely Mrs. Harkton, seemed to have blossomed out as a public character and a benefactor of her race. All right! But why hadn't he lifted up his voice in praise? Why hadn't she demanded that he do something like that? Why, in short, had they not rejoiced together over her triumph? There were several reasons, some clear, some not so clear. Getting back to fundamentals again, he had been something of a czar night before last, and a plain, thick-headed brute last evening; on the latter occasion he had said, had implied, things for which, back here behind the newspaper, he was honestly ashamed. Nor, granting the simple and well warranted faith in Helen which he had always taken as a matter of course, was any of this to be condoned by the rather startling circumstantial evidence—He had apologized, to be sure, but not prettily enough.

And still, even that aspect didn't seem to account for all of it! No, the thing that had jarred Samuel almost as severely as Nellie itself was the incredible attitude of Nellie's discoverer—the aloofness, the vast superiority, the plain, sickening, insufferable conceit! Why, it was exactly as if Nellie herself regarded him as that apparently lower form of animal life, merely Dr. Harkton's husband!

Well, *why?*

No matter what she had accomplished, that was not like Nellie. There was nothing in it which even resembled the wife he had known so long. Perhaps she had two personalities. That sometimes happened and—oh, perhaps poppycock. She had just one personality, and that a characteristically female one: unstable, easily exalted and

inflated, hypersensitized to everything, good and bad, that had a personal application. Being inherently like every other woman, the sudden impression that she was not quite like any other woman was what was raising Cain with Nellie.

Probably bubbling with self-satisfaction, she had been on her way to a nice, conservative little pedestal—and Samuel's brutality had given her a terrific boost, causing the pedestal to rise from a thing feet high to one miles high. Now she was luxuriating in an upper atmosphere where dominating, suspicious husbands probably resolved themselves into dust and blew away forever. Or that, at all events, was as near as Samuel could come to it.

As to the ultimate outcome—he sighed meditatively. Doubtless, Nature would take its course in this case as in every other case. Nellie would descend gradually to her appointed place; in fact, the physical part of her would be there tonight, or Samuel would know the reason why! And there was a considerable consolation, as there always is if one will but hunt long enough: she could not possibly affect his beloved business. That, worm-like in its significance, was still his own. He turned his paper and gazed at the portrait of his wife—and another bright thought came.

This pet sheet of his had a great trick of dressing up mole-hills until one mistook them for Rocky Mountains. He would buy several of the other papers as soon as he reached New York. He did this, tucking them under his arm and making for the subway and the home of Harkton, Inc.

Outside his building the head porter was polishing a brass sign; he turned and gaped at Samuel, quite as if viewing him for the very first time. Inside his building the elderly elevator man of the car Samuel always used bobbed his head with:

"Morning, Mr. Harkton! You feel pretty proud this morning, sir?"

"Eh?"

"I see Mrs. Harkton got her name in all the papers, sir."

"Yes," said Samuel.

So it was in all of them, was it? Natural enough, that, he supposed—although

somehow he had hoped that it was a feature of his own alarmist sheet. He stalked on; and the main door of Harkton, Inc., had not closed behind him when he was confronted by that peculiarly idiotic girl, so valued as secretary by Bell, the credit man. This creature, always impossible, stood squarely in his path and clasped her hands raptly.

"Oh, Mr. Harkton," she cried, "I want to congratulate you—I do indeed! Isn't it dear? Isn't it perfectly darling?"

"Isn't what perfectly darling?" the head of the firm asked sourly.

"Why, what Mrs. Harkton has done, of course! It's perfectly wonderful! It's perfectly unbelievable! Why, I've just been reading that anybody can take a pound of this drug that Mrs. Harkton invented and—and I've forgotten now what can be done with it, but it's perfectly amazing. And I want to congratulate you and, if you'd be so awfully good as to allow me to do that, I do wish, Mr. Harkton, that you'd take my congratulations to—"

"All right! Yes! Sure! Thanks!" Samuel barked, as he pushed on.

And *here* came the Savage kid, unquestionably with another eruption. Samuel slowed down and prepared to blast this one. And she was only smiling at him peculiarly and nodding.

"Good morning, Mr. Harkton," said she, and walked on.

Samuel, lips parted, was conscious of a sudden warm glow. She—say! There was a kid with an understanding soul. He stopped short. She might be cheap in some ways and a little too lurid in the matter of dress, but she had a brain and a heart of pure gold; she had failed to gush forth even one small congratulation! Aye, she had failed so much as to mention Nellie's performance; and while he would have had some difficulty in explaining just why this should have pleased him, it had done that very thing. And Samuel wheeled about abruptly and beckoned to the remarkable girl, and she returned to his side.

"About the—ah—excitement," he smiled. "Is everybody in the office talking about it?"

"Almost everybody," said Miss Savage.

"Well, I don't want any more demon-

strations," said Samuel. "All rot in the first place—subversive of discipline and so on. You understand?"

Miss Savage merely nodded, as casually, with understanding as complete as if he had merely directed the stamping of a dozen letters.

"Very well, Mr. Harkton," she said quietly. "I'll attend to that."

Without a word, without a comment, she simply passed on—obviously to attend to it. Some seconds Samuel, gazing after her, stood quite thunderstruck; he had not known that there was a woman—or for that matter, a person—in his employ like that. His heart warmed as he considered her receding form: *there*, by thunder, with the exception of himself, was the only real executive in the whole works!

He was still smiling when he entered his own office. He observed the start, the alacrity with which Miss Mills rose, the delighted brilliance of her eye as she came toward him—and ceased to smile. There was indeed something military about the stiffness with which Samuel awaited the approach of his secretary.

"You know what I'm going to say?" she dimpled.

"At least, I suspect," Samuel said evenly.

"Then—from the very bottom of my heart, I congratulate you on having a wife like that, Mr. Harkton!" said Miss Mills, and in her eye there was a mischievous twinkle.

"Thank you," Samuel said stiffly, and looked straight over her head.

The mischievous twinkle vanished. It may be that, just here, Miss Mills sensed the dire presumption of which she had been guilty, for she cooled visibly, becoming all in an instant her remote, precise office self.

"Why, it isn't possible that you—" did escape her.

Samuel elevated his brows ominously.

"What is not possible, Miss Mills?"

"Nothing, Mr. Harkton. Pardon me, please," said his aide, and dropped her eyes again.

"You were about to say—"

"I wanted to ask whether you wished

to do some dictating first or have me put in an hour or two instructing the girls Mr. Calvert took on. You mentioned that yesterday, Mr. Harkton."

"Go break 'em in, by all means," Samuel said acidly, as he made for his desk. "The mail can wait."

For whatever reason, he was glad to see her go. He glared after the slim, straight back, and sighed relievedly as the door closed.

Well, the worst was over, if one chose to feel that way about it. The blow, that is to say, had fallen and the first shock passed; he no longer had the dearest little fluffy woman in the world for a wife; he was the husband of a scientist. All right—so be it. They'd probably both recover and be on good terms again shortly without any great damage having been done. Samuel chuckled, not too merrily, and opened his papers. As yet his brain had not quite settled down to the day's business; he'd glance through the other stories of Nellie's achievement.

Their earlier paragraphs were not startling; they told much the same tale as his own pet journal. The average newspaper reporter's comprehension of science seemed to be about as clear and sweeping as his own, didn't it? One of them referred to *Nellium* as the newest metal; another mentioned it just as glibly as a gas; and still a third—hey? Samuel frowned suddenly at: "Mrs. Harkton's husband is employed by a New York hardware concern."

"Well, what the—" Samuel muttered.

"Employed," if you please, "by a New York hardware concern!" His warm eye hurried down the column. Was there any more of that? No, apparently there was no more; they hadn't even mentioned Mr. Harkton again. But one of the other sheets might have mentioned him, and just as unflatteringly. Samuel spread out the next paper and glared at it, and presently he whined aloud, for:

"Dr. Harkton's husband, upon whose name this brilliant little woman has brought so much glory, is Charles F. Harkton, a tinware salesman."

"Well, dammit! I believe that's actionable!" shouted the head of Harkton, Inc.

"You do, eh?" Thomas Wilbur chuckled. Samuel started violently and scowled upward.

"Oh, you, is it? Good morning. Yes, I do!" he snapped. "Have you read this?"

"Yep. It isn't a marker to the one you haven't opened yet," Thomas grinned. "You're John Harkton, a canvasser, in that one—and the fellow who wrote it gave his imagination a little free rein and assumed that the grand prize would pay for the little suburban home you'd been struggling to buy and help educate the kids."

"What?"

"Doesn't mean a thing, any of it, and—"

"It doesn't, eh?" Samuel shouted. "Well, it means that two or three lawsuits will begin to pop before noon. D'ye think I'm going to let this bunch of scandalmonsters hold me up to ridicule and get away with it? D'ye think— Here! Call up Stanwood and tell him to come around, quick! We'll start something."

"No, we won't," Thomas corrected soothingly. "I'll call up Stanwood, and he'll have the papers correct all that stuff—which they'll do quite readily, I think, when they know that Stanwood's our lawyer, and—"

"Correct, be hanged!" Samuel cried, although a shade less furiously. "I'll take enough good dollars away from that crowd to—"

"Sammy! Listen!" the head of the sales department put in firmly. "You're running a big hardware concern here. You're not running a madhouse or a school for emotional acting, whatever Nellie may have done— And at that, I'll say the little scoundrel had something up her sleeve last night, eh?" he smiled. "Something pretty practical about the kind of science that hauls 'em in fifty thousand at a crack, Sam. You did some apologizing this morning?"

"Yes. But *this*—"

"Oh, hang that! I'll attend to it. Sam—what I started to say—have *you* heard from Brink?"

"No. Why?"

"Well, I haven't, either, and he's been here in town since yesterday morning," Mr. Wilbur went on, and his smile vanished. "I

called up the St. Arthur, where he always stops, and he was out. Called up again this morning, and he was out again, and he hadn't left any word for me. I don't like that a little bit, Sam. That contract isn't signed yet, and there are people in this burg who'd be tickled pink to get hold of Brink and shave prices until—"

Strangely, after all those years of utter concentration on his business, Samuel only shrugged angrily.

"Brink 'll turn up when he gets ready, I suppose. If he reads all this twaddle, he may conclude that I'm too much of a joke to do business with and never turn up!"

Thomas shook his head and grinned faintly.

"You don't seem so crazy about personal publicity, after all," he reflected. "Day before yesterday I thought you were getting ready to bust into the public eye and make quite a splurge?"

"I don't like this kind!" Samuel snapped. "I'm perfectly willing to do some shining of my own kind in my own line."

"Umum," mused Thomas. "Sam, is it possible that too much hard work and too much hardware have knocked your vision into a cocked hat, whatever you were getting ready to tell the trade journals about it—or are you actually getting filled up with the pride and the haughty spirit that precedeth destruction, and so on?"

"What does it mean?" grunted the head of the firm wearily.

"Means that, so far as I'm able to see, Nell's going to give the firm about a million dollars' worth of free advertising before she is through with this stunt," sighed Thomas. "Confound it! I *wish* Brink would show up!"

"Well, I may be old-fashioned and out of date and a swell-headed ass and all the rest of it," Mr. Harkton propounded, savagely, "but I'm eternally dod-blasted if I want my wife to do any free advertising for—"

Here he paused, in the very act of bringing down an emphatic fist, for the door was opening and the little girl who presided over the desk in the anteroom was looking timidly at him.

"The—the photographer, Mr. Harkton," she said timidly. "The man to take your picture!"

CHAPTER VIII.

PENALTIES OF SCIENCE.

SAMUEL subsided. He also brightened strangely, in a queerly pathetic way; it was exactly as if some kindly magic wand had waved above him, sweeping him back to that happy, complacent atmosphere of day before yesterday.

"Er—all right. Send him in!" he directed. "You get out of here, Tom!"

"There are about fifty suggestions I'd like to make while he's operating on you; still I appreciate your diffidence," Mr. Wilbur chuckled, as he started for the door. "Sam, have you read through the forty pages of specifications that go with that Brink contract?"

"No!"

"Well, for the love of Mike, will you forget Nellie and do it?" the head of the sales department cried, desperately, and threw out his hands in appeal. "You, personally, have got about four hours' work to do on that thing before you can go at him intelligently, and he's likely to be here any minute! Will you *please* get at it?"

"I—yes, I'll get at it as soon as I'm through with this man, Tom," said the old, quiet voice of the head of Harkton, Inc. "Beat it!"

The door closed, with Thomas on the outside and the photographer on the inside.

This latter, Samuel noted with mild interest, seemed to be quite a character. He was a small man in early middle age and of peculiarly shrunken effect, with an eye bright and alert as the eye of a fox and a body apparently capable of motion as swift as any panther's. Plainly, in the practice of his profession, he was no purveyor of prefatory remarks; he looked just once at Samuel and then he bounded forward, the while unlimbering the front of his box.

Just once, too, he glanced at the big windows. He smiled, with what struck Samuel vaguely as one of the most oddly open and disarming smiles he had ever seen.

"Light enough here for a gallery, sir," he observed genially. "Will you sit just as you are for a moment?"

"Er—ah—shan't I be writing, or something of that sort?" Samuel asked rather breathlessly.

"Yes, do that please—yes, just that way. Hold it a second, sir! Thanks, Mr. Harkton. Now, will you lean your cheek on one hand and look straight at the camera; want to get you full-face, sir. That's the idea. Only don't smile, please. Look sober. Look as if you were thinking hard about something mighty important, Mr. Harkton and—there! Got you! Now, will you stand up, please?" requested the cyclonic photographer.

So Samuel stood up beside his desk.

"Like—ah—this?"

"Well—one like that," agreed the visitor, although he did not seem entirely pleased. His penetrating eye focused suddenly; he examined Samuel very critically indeed for a full three seconds. "Will you just throw out your chest, sir, and stick the fingers of your right hand between the buttons of your vest? Like *this*!"

"No, I won't!" responded Samuel, annoyed. "D'ye think I want to look like a tintype of an old-fashioned ward politician?"

Almost hypnotically the keen eyes fastened upon him—and they softened suddenly and seemed hurt; they were nearly the eyes of an earnest, pleading child.

"Why, you won't look anything like that, Mr. Harkton," their owner explained. "That makes a very effective portrait, sir, and particularly with a big-built, impressive man like you. Anyhow, if it isn't unusually good we don't have to use it—and if it is it'll be a winner! Do you mind taking that pose and holding it for a second, sir, so I can see just how it does look? I can tell better that way, you know, and—"

His voice faded out. He bent over his instrument. And almost immediately he was straightening up again and folding the front of his machine back into place and making toward the door.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Harkton!" he said, with a really graceful bow. "Hope

I haven't taken too much of your time, sir? *Good day!*"

And he was gone and Samuel was sitting down again, with a puff and a somewhat bewildered grin.

There, bar nobody at all, was the briskest man alive! With a mind and a body tuned up to that speed, Samuel would have been a millionaire at twenty-five! He chuckled once more. About the time one or two of those shots appeared in the trade journals, Nellie would understand that at least she had no monopoly in the matter of spreading pictured Harkton beauties before the public and—say! this was *not* getting to work!

So Samuel rang for the little girl in the anteroom and ordered that Miss Mills be found and returned to him at once. He spread out the rather staggering specifications of the Brink contract, blinked at them once or twice, advised the office telephone operator rather sadly that he was not to be disturbed until further notice, waved the arriving Miss Mills to the chair beside him—and went to work in good earnest.

And so, for hours on end, he labored, at the sort of task which he loved and which quite absorbed him. The luncheon period came; and since Miss Mills had the irritating habit of eating regularly and left as a matter of course, Samuel slipped out by the little door of his private office which led to the side stairs, hurried to the tiny lunchroom around the corner, gobbled mechanically and hurried back to work. And the afternoon wore on and, with the more intricate details of the Brink matter out of the way, gradually, mystically, a blessed sanity, a priceless poise, stole back upon Samuel Harkton!

The heat of recent emotions all departed. He was himself again—not that proud self which seemed to have arrived with the "Harkton, Inc.," engraving, but an earlier and pleasanter self—the Samuel who loved his wife and his home above all things. Actually, it was like coming to the surface after a long and strangling dive!

This nicer Samuel seemed to be standing apart, viewing the whole recent mess with astonishment and more than a little remorse. Once or twice he paused in his dictating and

pondered upon matters which had no connection with Brink. Why, in all their married life, he and Nellie had never known a commotion like this! They had had the usual thousand and one minor disagreements, to be sure, but hardly a single real quarrel. And this thing was beginning to hurt the real Samuel much after the fashion of an aching tooth! More than anything else in the world this afternoon he wanted to go home—not just to the house, but to the home!

Well, then, why didn't he do it? In his heart of hearts he knew perfectly well that even if she had discovered a baker's dozen of new elements, Nellie would still esteem him as the whole of her life. Which was precisely the way he had been feeling about Nellie ever since she had been twelve years old or so! In his heart, too, he knew that long before this Nellie herself had descended from her astounding altitudes and returned to her beloved fireside. One might safely give odds of an hundred to one that she was there at this moment and—well, why wasn't *he* on the way, too, to make his peace?

"We'll let the rest of this go until tomorrow!" Samuel stated suddenly.

Miss Mills glanced up dubiously.

"I don't mind staying late, if you want to clear up—"

"We'll let the rest of it go till tomorrow!" Samuel repeated and arose — and faced the entering Miss Savage, who closed the door carefully behind her.

"You *don't* want to see the reporters, Mr. Harkton?" she queried, doubtfully.

"Reporters?"

"Yes, from several of the papers. They've been there most of the day and two or three are still sticking it out. I've told them that you were in a conference."

"You did well!" Samuel smiled broadly.

"And I thought I'd better warn you, so that if you wanted to go out the side door, Mr. Harkton?" said this intelligent girl.

"Well, my dear Miss Savage, I'm ever so much obliged to you!" the head of the concern said quite fervently. "Thank you!"

The girl favored him with her own odd, little, sophisticated smile and departed. Samuel reached for his hat.

"*There's a bright girl!*" he informed his secretary.

Miss Mills raised her brows slightly, without enthusiasm.

"Oh, yes," she murmured.

"A doggoned bright girl! She'll land somewhere!" added Samuel, as he started for the side door.

And now, being blessed with that almost incredible astuteness in such matters which is so much a part of his sex and his kind, he knew just what to do. He would load himself down with candy and flowers for Helen, and having laid these time-honored symbols at her feet, he would discover that the whole misunderstanding had been erased as if by magic. And by golly they'd have dinner alone and in peace, and if Nellie didn't come around and sit on his knee for her coffee, Samuel knew nothing about women—or about that adorable little woman, at any rate!

He hunted for a little and found those particularly large fluffily filled chocolates of which at one time Helen had been so fond. He looked for just the right roses, too, and fluttered over their preparation, weirdly mixing the effects of a lovelorn youth and a crochety old lady. Laden at last, he boarded his train and settled down with a sigh, headed at last straight for Montvale and reconciliation!

His heart thumped boyishly as he hurried up the curved drive. Never in all his life had he been so doggoned glad to get home as he was this early evening! His sparkling eye settled upon the door as he approached; this time, he knew, it would open before he could find his key.

And still—it did not open.

So Samuel found his key and opened it, after dropping the roses once and all but dropping the candy. He entered, smiling expectantly—yet his sparkling eye met only the equally sparkling eye of Josephine, his sister-in-law, who was just hurrying toward him.

"Oh, you're a dear!" this young woman cried, and kissed Samuel, which was unusual!

"I am, eh?" Samuel asked, quite genially. "Where—"

"You bet you are!" said Josephine. "I

was going to telephone you and ask you to come home early, and then I was actually afraid, you went off with such a grouch this morning, Sam. Sam! Dinner's all attended to and everything and—oh, where did I put that hat?"

"Well, where is—well, wait!" Samuel stammered.

"Can't, Sam! Jimmy Burgess has been phoning me all day; he wants me to go to that garden party at the Thorndyke's and it's the one thing I've been dying to do and—oh, there it is!"

"Are you—are you going now!"

"Yes, and I'll be home here just as early as I can, Sam," said the hurried young woman, as she made for the door. "Half-past one—or two o'clock at the most and—"

"Well, all right, but just stand still for one minute, can't you?" Samuel demanded. "Where's Helen?"

Quite startled, Josephine did stand still.

"Oh—yes—Helen," she answered. I'd almost forgotten, Sam. Helen isn't coming home to-night!"

"She isn't *what*?" Samuel gasped.

"No, she phoned in about three. She was captured by that Mrs.—Mrs.—oh, what's the woman's beastly name, Sam? The one who gave half a million to the Foundation last year; you know the woman I mean. Well, anyway, Mrs.—whatever her name is—is giving some sort of scientific society shindig at her country place to-night and she insisted that Helen go along and read her paper. Nell said there was no way of getting out of it."

Samuel drew one deep breath.

"She didn't mention when she *was* coming home, did she?"

"No, she didn't Sam," said Josephine, and moved on toward the door.

Samuel drew another deep breath.

"How can I get in touch with Helen on the telephone?" he inquired darkly.

"How?" Josephine, briefly, came almost to a standstill again. "Why—I'm sure I don't know, Sam. If—if I could think of her name, you might—but, even so, we don't know where her country place is, do we? It's somewhere within motoring distance of New York, of course, because they

were just starting when Nell phoned, but—what do you want to phone about?"

"Nothing!" Samuel said, coldly, incisively. "I haven't the slightest curiosity about my wife's movements, of course. Don't let me detain you, Josephine!"

"No, I won't, old thing—thanks for being so nice about it!" Miss Meeker tossed back to him, as she fled, laughing happily.

Perhaps a minute, Samuel merely looked about him. He was not angry; he was somewhat astonished at that realization. He was rather chilly, somewhere inside, and a black depression was coming down upon him swiftly. He turned at last to meet the grave eye of his daughter—and for an instant they only smiled at one another and Samuel turned more chilly.

Pretty as she was, normal child as she was, nevertheless there were times when, looking at his daughter, Samuel had the queerest sense that she was about three hundred years old and that she had acquired saddening wisdom all along the route! This was one of the times.

She was in his arms now and Samuel was holding her quite fiercely. And now she had disengaged herself and sighed.

"You brought those flowers for mother?" she said.

"I—yes, honey," Samuel sighed.

"It's too bad, dad, but—don't you care. Oh—and the candy!"

Samuel, with a dreadful effort, yanked to his visage what passed for a normal fatherly grin.

"I guess I brought the candy for you kids," he lied cheerfully. "But not before dinner, Dot."

Dinner could have been more cheerful. Despite his best efforts, conversation had a way of ceasing to exist, completely as a drop of water in desert sunshine. The younger Samuel was turning rather morose, although this did not affect his appetite; several times he asked anxiously of his mother, and Samuel replied jocosely.

Not that he could go on replying jocosely for any definite period, though. Even before dinner was over he knew that the truth of the tragedy would have to be communicated somehow, even to this little five-year-old boy, heartlessly abandoned to the care

of an aunt and two or three servants, a tender lamb slaughtered on the altar of science! Possibly not quite so bad as all that, although the phrase, running over in his brain, appealed to Samuel as fitting the case with ghastly snugness!

He was glad when dinner was over. He smiled quite pathetically as his little daughter wound an arm about his neck.

"I'll read Sammy his story and put him to bed, father," said she. "You needn't bother."

"Well—thanks, honey!" smiled Samuel, and hugged her gratefully.

"You stay down here and read. I know you're tired. Er—where did you put the candy, father, dear?"

"Over there. Not too much of it, Dot."

"No, father, dear," beamed this wise and dutiful child, and left him to rest.

One hour Samuel devoted to his thoughts. They were dark thoughts; some of them were mocking; none of them led anywhere at all. Then, grimly, Samuel jerked down the legs of the card table in his den, found cards and settled, more grimly, to solitaire. He, at least, owned the conscience of a parent; it might be silly, but he could not go to bed comfortably until he knew that Josephine was back.

But how he hated solitaire! And solitude! Damnation, how he did hate them both! He fumed over the table, puffing hard at his pipe. Solitude! Why, by all the particularly malevolent gods, he might as well have been wandering alone in the middle of the Sahara as—

"Excuse me," said Olga, the new maid.

"Huh?"

"Ban people to seen you!" Olga stated precisely.

Samuel opened his eyes wonderingly. There certainly were people out there; he heard them talking and chattering in the living room, in the big hallway. He struggled to his feet and hurried forth, his solitude relieved so unexpectedly.

They saw him. They cheered gayly. They demanded Helen. They were, as he observed at once, neighbors all in festive mood, to the number of thirty or so. They had come, as he learned presently, hotly, as a little surprise delegation of old friends,

to congratulate Dr. Helen Harkton. Also, they bore floral offerings—just by the way, as Samuel had borne them to the same deserted shrine—and they were bubbling with irresponsible mirth and the spirit of the occasion. Samuel looked them over and his heart turned to hot, resentful stone: out of the whole collection there was not one he liked, whose society he could even tolerate without an effort!

There was a certain chagrin apparent, when they understood that Helen herself was not to be of their number. Still, they had come to celebrate her triumph and with Samuel right there to act as proxy for his distinguished wife, they proceeded to celebrate in their informal, neighborly way.

It is better not to dwell upon this party and the reactions of Samuel Harkton. The nervous part of him was badly out of adjustment to-night. And the household owned a piano, of course, and a talking machine and, given these last two ingredients, the impromptu dance which followed little idiotic Leslie Peeks and her doll-faced husband just as a shadow follows normal people, materialized in about twenty-five minutes.

But they went home just before twelve, leaving flowers and congratulations behind them for Helen. They bubbled and giggled and laughed their way out of the house, and Samuel still lived. Not much more than that, to be sure, but he still lived. He who had so recently detested solitude now gave up a prayer of thanks for solitude and staggered back to his cards.

There was a timid little step upon the stairs presently. Samuel went to investigate. He found his daughter, much more moody than usual, standing in the living room doorway, in her little nightie. She smiled very sadly at Samuel.

"I couldn't sleep," she explained.

"That's funny, with that—that crew of hare-brained imbeciles shrieking their lungs out, darling!" the hospitable Samuel said bitterly. "They're gone now, thank—er—thank goodness. You'd better run back to bed."

Dorothy sighed.

"It's so lonely with mother away," she observed.

"Well, mother 'll be back pretty soon!" Samuel forced out, and patted her head; and the child nestled to him and solemnly contemplated the flowers, strewn all about.

"Doesn't it look—doesn't it smell—just like a funeral?" she murmured.

"Say, for the love of—" Samuel Harkton began in a gasp; and instantly controlled himself and shakily patted the head again. "Honey, dearest," said Samuel, "I want you to run off to bed and to sleep. Everything's all right and—and—and it isn't at all like a funeral!"

"It is, though!" the child insisted as she drew away. "It's just like Mrs. Maynard's fune—"

"Dolly, dear!" Samuel choked, sternly. "Go—to—bed!"

Dorothy climbed the stairs slowly. Samuel, watching until she turned at the head of the flight, waved his hand and returned to his cards.

A clock struck one. A clock struck half past one. And presently a clock struck two, while Samuel still laid out his cards and thought and thought and thought.

"I want my mother!" a small, somehow a dreadful, voice insisted, upstairs—Sammy's voice, indeed. "I—want my mother!" said this voice again, and ended with a groan.

Samuel Harkton's spine froze. It—it wasn't just the natural wail of a lonely kid; an inner parental instinct advised him of this and brought him to his feet. Something—something was *wrong* up there! Samuel ran toward the stairs. Bad enough, Heaven alone knew, to have the poor little fellow forsaken by an unnatural mother; but if anything ever—ever really happened to him—

He jerked open the door and entered, wild-eyed. He moaned awfully! He shut his teeth upon the terror-stricken whine that rose to his lips; something was indeed happening to Sammy. With poor little Dorothy drooping over him at one side of the bed; with Olga, in flowery dressing gown, looking down at him with more concern than one might have fancied possible to just that face, Samuel the younger was whimpering and writhing in pain.

And dreadful fingers clutched at the heart

of Samuel the elder and stilled its beating, for he knew! His boy—his little boy—was dying! He seized him and picked him up and there was a scream of agony and a heartbreaking:

"I want my—mother!"

"Father!" Dorothy said thinly. "Is he—"

Something in that flattened, despairing voice hurled Samuel into action. Tenderly he laid his son upon the bed. Madly, he raced to the telephone in his own room.

And so, within a matter of minutes, the bell rang and Dr. Richard Boyce, a somewhat towseled and breathless physician, swung his black bag into the home, had the vile taste to yawn in Samuel's face as that gentleman bade him ascend while still there might be hope and then did ascend quickly.

Quite anxiously, since he was really the oldest friend of Samuel, Jr., he bent over the ostensibly dying child. He poked and prodded about a bit and then stood up and looked sourly at Samuel.

"What's he been eating, Sam?" he snapped.

"Hey? His dinner—just—just the regular food he always eats, Dick! He began—"

"O-oh!" observed Dorothy, prolonging the sound strangely.

Dr. Boyce glanced at her, just as she sank to the bed beside her brother.

"You, too, eh?" he grunted. And he opened his bag and looked meditatively at Olga. "Well, better bring me—"

Be it considered that here runs a line of asterisks. You will appreciate the significance, even the necessity, of these asterisks.

A clock struck three.

Samuel was back at his solitaire. He was still shaking and weak, to be sure, yet he had Boyce's assurance that little Samuel's chances of life were of the very best. Boyce, indeed, at parting, had made an ill-considered remark or two on the general proposition of calling a man out of bed at that hour when there was a medicine cabinet right at hand.

Which showed how little fitted is the hardened sawbones to treat children with

properly delicate sympathy. Or maybe Boyce had been minimizing the dangers for the sake of keeping Samuel easy; Boyce was pretty decent. But he couldn't fool Samuel very much if ever a kid had been in dire agony—

Hah! The outer door was closing softly. Samuel Harkton arose with a foul, shameless curse upon his lips. He stalked into the living room, reaching it just as his sister-in-law turned from putting the chain on the outer door.

Samuel considered her with altogether unwarranted emotions. His big chest heaved up and down, up and down.

"Hah!" said Samuel.

At this sound, Josephine ceased her humming quite abruptly. Her pretty head came up. Her happy eyes ceased their sparkling and flashed inquiry.

"What, Sam?"

"You're back, are you?" boomed from Samuel.

"Yes. Of course. Why? What time is it?"

"It's half past three in the morning!" snarled out of the master of the house.

"And for all you—"

"Now, that's enough! Do you hear—*enough!*" the young woman interrupted with much energy. "You may be able to browbeat poor little Nellie until she doesn't dare call her soul her own, but you can't browbeat *me*, Sam Harkton! I wanted to stay another hour, until the fun was all over, and I didn't because I had the children on my mind."

"The children! The children!" Sam croaked with a blazing scorn that should have blistered the very varnish beneath the souls of her little dancing slippers. "Well, for all the—"

But Josephine, humming carelessly, ostentatiously, again, was not heeding him at all. Chin high, she sped up the stairs; and Samuel relaxed and groaned and gazed hotly after her, and then tottered about wearily, turning off lights.

And now the lights were all out and the windows and doors were all locked and Samuel himself trudged upstairs. He was tired! He was most infernally tired! Bar-

ring not too frequent trips to the theater and not too frequent local social affairs, eleven o'clock usually found Samuel in bed and ready for slumber.

A moment he paused on the upper landing, with a weary, hazy thought of stealing in and making sure that his children still survived; but he changed his mind and would have shuffled on, but that the portal of the children's room burst open just then, and Josephine, breathless, incredulous, outraged, a patch of high color on either cheek, was before him.

"Well—well, upon my word, Sam Harkton!" she sputtered viciously at him. "Haven't you any brains at all?"

"Wh-what?" rasped Samuel.

"Were you trying to kill them to spite Nellie?" the absurd young woman panted. "Three solid pounds of candy and they'd eaten their way almost through the sticky mess! I don't know! A—a man's not expected to have much intelligence, but I think that *you*—"

One house to the north, a maiden lady dreamed luridly of the story she had been reading all evening. This dealt with dire plots and much dynamite—and now the poor lady sat bolt upright, eyes closed still, and screamed and screamed, and then with a final scream buried herself beneath the covers and waited through awful seconds for the ceiling to fall down upon her.

And one house to the south lived a certain Herbert Knowles, a light sleeper and a very nervous man generally. At the very same second, this Mr. Knowles bounced from his bed, wide-awake, and automatically reached for his big revolver with one hand and with the other pulled the switch that turned on every light in the house. He stood there rigid, frozen, cold sweat pouring down his yellow-white face, listening and listening for the next manifestation of the predatory band which, presumably, had just broken in his vestibule with a battering-ram!

These two unpleasant phenomena hailed solely and simply from that unbelievable burst of crashing sound created by Samuel Harkton in closing his bedroom door that early morning.



Cheap Tools

By THOMAS P. FRENEY

WHEN half the batter had been scorched into flapjacks, Quong flung a pot lid down on the rusty top of the stove. The effect was tremendous; the log walls seemed to belly outward from the clangor. Three mounds of blankets in three box bunks became three up-sitting men, two of whom fell to cursing the Chinese with deliberate thoroughness.

"Bleakfas' leady dam' soon."

Quong did not turn from his cooking. His bent back, its green shirt X-ed by blue overall suspenders, shed epithets as his oiled boots shed water.

The man who had not cursed swung sturdy legs over the side of his bunk and reached beneath it for socks. He was younger than the others; not tall, but big-muscled, thick-bodied, with the face of a fighter who had fought too much. A chin that should have been ample was under-shot; firm lips were drawn down in sullenness; well-spaced eyes were flecked with red and the flesh around them was dark; irritable little lines roughened his forehead, and unpleasant grooves spread down from the flare of his nose. Badly beaten men in

the prize ring come out for the last round with faces like that.

He dressed slowly, not looking at the two men who got into their clothes on the other side of the cabin. These two looked often at John Dariel while they dressed, and at each other, exchanging glances that came knowingly from corners of their eyes.

Their faces had not been marked by too much fighting, nor by any. The elder—fleshy, asthmatic Hogan—had a blotchy red face whereon sixty years of aimlessness had left their record beneath a ruddy scalp that had given up its last hair. The other—Evans—was a lanky man of less than forty, with a face that was prepossessing until you noticed his chin. Then you looked again at his other features, and found as little of purpose there as in Hogan's. Two men who could not conceivably become so engrossed in any business that they would not have time to stop a while to hear or tell an anecdote—that sort.

Evans completed his toilet by running his fingers through his straw-colored hair, and stood up to stretch and yawn.

"Well, boss," he drawled, "how's tricks this mornin'?"

Daniel avoided his employee's eye by looking past him through the open doorway, to where the California foothills—beyond the creek that was invisible in its cañoned bed—were black and lavender against a gray sky.

"All right," he said stiffly, and went outside to wash.

"John ain't such a good loser, an' that's a fact," Hogan—pulling a patched blue shirt down over his naked head—said complacently when Daniel had disappeared.

Evans stretched again and yawned.

"No. But then he's young, an' ain't been up against the world much."

Thus each boasted of his own serenity in the face of a lifetime of defeats.

Quong dragged a table into the center of the hard earthen floor and began to clatter the meal down on it. Hogan studied the soggy flapjacks with a watery calculation in his eyes.

"How much grub left?" he asked the Chinese.

"To-day, thlee mo' day—tha's all."

Hogan and Evans nodded together, without dissatisfaction.

When Daniel returned—his face red and shiny, but the marks of the beaten fighter not erased—the four men sat down and ate. Hogan and Evans with vigor, the Chinese lightly, Daniel as one who knows that a man must have food. They looked at their plates while they ate, and no one spoke until the plates were empty.

Then Daniel pushed back his chair and stood up.

"Let's get started."

His voice was throaty and flat, with a suggestion of restraint barely managed.

The Chinese went out with the others, leaving the breakfast dishes on the table. A few paces from the cabin door they came to the brink of a cliff that overhung Feather Creek. The stream widened here in a circular basin, forty or fifty feet across, rimmed by seventy-foot walls of rock. The basin's surface was smooth as a green soapstone disk under the dull sky, but its upper and lower portals were narrow clefts where white water seethed and grumbled.

Down the face of the cliff from the point where the four men reached it,

ran a length of rope, a hand line following a zigzag trail to the water. A pontoon bridge connected the foot of the trail with a heavy raft—a dozen feet square—tethered in midstream by two wire strands. Floating atop two bare tree trunks, a sluice box lay on the water, one end on the raft, the other dipping into the spray of the basin's outlet; attached to the upstream edge of the raft was a long-bladed water wheel.

One at a time, Daniel first, the others following, the men went down the crooked path, across the pontoon to the raft. Evans and Quong tested the creaking air pump that occupied the center of the raft, adjusting the gears by which the water wheel was attached to it, while Hogan helped Daniel get into a shabby diving suit, which exaggerated the younger man's breadth, giving him the appearance of some strange, deep sea monster.

Standing on the ladder that led down into the water, Daniel waited until his helmet had been screwed into place, grasped the guide rope, and dropped slowly below the surface.

Twice he stopped to adjust the valve on his helmet, and to hang motionless for the ten minutes his body required to adapt itself to the increasing pressure; then he stood knee-deep in the mud and silt of the creek bed. Another brief rest, and one groping foot found the edge of an iron casing that stood up out of the mud. He stepped inside the five-foot cylinder, signaled, and sank again. With outstretched hands he felt the four-foot lengths of tubing slip past him, automatically counting the joints. Five of them, and solid ground was under his feet again.

With bare hands already numbed by cold water and the pressure of the clamps that held the diving suit's sleeves to his wrists, he found his tool—a ten-inch iron-steel gad—and began to pick at the ground under the edge of the iron tube in which he worked. He worked slowly, his brain not consciously directing his muscles, forcing the point of his gad into the ground, scraping, scratching with mechanical application to a familiar task.

His mind, freed from his body for the

time, sat apart and studied him: a cumber-somely garbed thing in utter blackness gnawing at the earth with one steel tooth; grubbing away within a piece of pipe that held back the loose submarine earth, twenty feet beneath the creek bottom, eighty more below the surface; stopping now and then to scoop the invisible crumbs his gnawing had yielded into a can, to be drawn to the surface and washed for the gold that was never there.

His mind saw nothing individual in the spectacle; it was a representative display of human endeavor. If you were a man, this—in one form or another—was your lot; it was inescapable.

Was a time when you did not suspect it, when you dreamed extravagantly. You knew there was gold beneath this basin. You knew it because every yellow grain that had been found farther downstream had passed through it, washed down from the mother lode, to be caught by sandbars where the creek widened, and held for the bearded gold hunters of the last mid-century. They had taken thousands upon thousands of dollars from the creek. That much had passed through this basin; how much had been trapped in the basin's maw? A cone-shaped volcanic hole in the water's path, taking toll of the stream's golden cargo year after year, its deep pocket slowly filling with the heavy particles. You knew there was gold here.

You went to a friend who was a mining man, and who had a little money, and you told him about it. He listened with bright eyes, and he thought a long while before he shook his head.

"Maybe you're right, John," he said. "I guess there's gold there, but I don't think a man could get it out with a diving suit. A pump or a dredge—but it'd take twenty thousand dollars to get started with them. A diving suit sounds kind of flighty. Know anybody that ever tried it?"

You did not, and his refusal to take part in the venture, tentative until then, acquired finality. You went to other men you knew, and to some you did not. You talked to men in Sacramento, in San Francisco, and in Los Angeles. Some were po-

lite, some laughed, some heard you through, others cut you off before you were well started. None opened his check book.

You had a very few dollars; you added to them by personal loans, ten dollars here, twenty there; you stretched your credit to the utmost, and you got an outfit of a sort. A much repaired diving suit with an old, long-spouted helmet, a rickety, deep-sea pump, a bare minimum of food, pack animals, odds and ends of necessities, never a thing without which you could possibly skimp along.

Your last cent gone, you faced the task of getting labor. You needed five men, and four of them should have been good men to handle the pump. You got three men, none of whom was a good man. You had to take those three because they were all you could get: the right sort of men went where salaries were a certainty, not a contingency upon the success of an untried enterprise. Your three inefficient were left to you because no one else wanted them; they were men as little able to pick their jobs as you were to pick your employees.

You brought your shabby outfit, your inadequate supplies, and your three precious assistants up here among the Sierra foothills. On the second trip one of them, Hogan, let a horse go off the flume bridge at South Fork, and two weeks' food was lost. Three days were spent rigging the raft, the flume, and the water wheel, which, however dangerous to the man below, was essential to the performance of any work at all. It handled one side of the deep-sea pump, while Hogan, Evans, and Quong toiled in five-minute shifts at the other. You lost three more days while the men acquired sufficient skill at the pump to permit a descent.

Then you went down after the gold. You thought the gold would lie upon bedrock a few feet beneath the sand and gravel of the creek bed. You lowered a four-foot length of iron casing until it sat on end in the gravel. You climbed inside, and with your steel gad scraped the creek bottom from beneath the casing's edge, now and then pounding the casing deeper into the ground. As the soil you gouged out piled up around your feet you scooped it

into a can, which some one on the raft pulled up and emptied into the sluice box.

The first section of the casing sank into the ground until less than a foot of it protruded. It had been five feet in diameter. On an improvised anvil you bent an iron plate into another length of casing, just sufficiently less than five feet in diameter to slip down inside the first. You lowered that in place, bit by bit, scraped the creek bed from beneath it, and forced it down. When you had sunk it until only three or four inches of its upper edge were within the first length, you were still not down to bed rock, and the can had not carried so much as one flake of gold to the surface. You fashioned another piece of casing still smaller in diameter, to fit inside the second one, dug a way for it, hammered it down. And came to nothing.

Meanwhile you wasted day after day, while your scant store of food shrank within its containers. Quong blended an emergency pint of brandy with spirits of ammonia and Jamaica ginger from the medicine supply, into a spree that lasted a day and a half. Toward the end of that day and a half he fell into the creek; the immersion awakened the rheumatism that was never altogether absent from his thin hips, and for two more days he was useless. No diving could be done with less than a full crew, so three and a half days were wasted there. The shaky pump fell apart; repairs that should have taken an hour occupied your bungling crew for half a day. And all the while the sacks that held your food grew looser around their contents, and more wrinkled.

You lengthened your stays under water, trying to offset the time you had lost. You stayed down too long day after day, and you paid for it. Your body became a thing of infinite pain: an agony sat in each muscle, breathing became a feat accomplished only with conscious effort, your heart pounded against the walls of its prison.

Working below the surface—scratching the ground, driving lengths of casing down, patiently crumbling boulders of slate—you were never fully conscious. The weight and velvet-blackness of the water drugged you: your pains were such as an elemental be-

ing—the bloated sea toad you resembled—might feel: a vague aching that could not be traced to any particular part of your body. But when you came up out of your well to rest and eat and sleep, you came as if from an anesthetic—with augmented capacity for suffering. You were a quivering, tingling lump of flesh; you wondered that the blood did not spring from your pores each time you moved.

Your brain, too, awakened to pain. You saw your second-hand equipment with microscopic clearness: the rattling pump, the treacherous water wheel, the worn air line, the rubber suit, with its patches, its frayed spots, and its insecure seams. You shuddered, and knew you would never have the courage to trust your life to these things again—until it was time to go down on the morrow.

You came to hate your three ineffectual assistants with a bitterness that was not sane. You tried to ignore them, and failed. You studied them for hours on end, spying upon them between apparently closed lids, listening to their talk, even to their breathing when they slept. You had had no illusions when you first employed them, you had taken them because no other labor was to be had on your terms. You laughed and clapped them on the back when they made their early blunders. You shrugged and said: "Things like that will happen," when Hogan lost a horse and two weeks' food crossing the South Fork bridge. When Quong's drunkenness and resultant rheumatism held up the work for three and a half days you were not able to laugh, but you kept most of your rage to yourself.

Gradually your restraint left you; these three men took it away with their careless inefficiency, their half-hearted laboring, and their ingrained habits of time wasting. You bellowed at them, nagged them, cursed them; all to no advantage. The Chinese remained glum, secretive, and shiftless; the two whites remained amiable and shiftless. You stopped speaking to them except when something had to be said, and you learned to hate them.

You despised them all the more because they had not deserted you after the first few days' labor killed their dreams of find-

ing wealth. Quong's mind was hidden from you, but not the white men's. You knew that neither Hogan nor Evans had faith now in your ability to send yellow gold up from your well. But they stayed with you: they lacked the initiative to quit. They stayed, and ate. It should have been ridiculous, but there was nothing left in you to laugh; so it was fiendish. The work would have to stop when the food was gone: Hogan and Evans gorged themselves, no matter how uninviting the provender might be. They swallowed enormous mouthfuls and counted the increasing wrinkles in the food sacks. You were afraid to limit their food; you were afraid to snap the thread of irresolution that held them to you. You pretended ignorance of their gluttony and of its purpose; and worked harder, and sank more lengths of iron casing; each successive length giving you less working space, carrying you down into still greater pressure.

You found two words that lumped your whole outfit—animate and inanimate—together; two words that answered everything, explained everything: cheap tools. The two words fascinated you; they were with you day and night. Cheap tools: of all the phrases in the world only that one had a vital meaning. You whispered it when you lay on your bunk at night covertly studying your employees; you walked up and down the bank of the creek saying it aloud when the smothering weight of your hatred had driven you away from them. Cheap tools: all history in two syllables.

You muttered the words now as you dropped your gad and signaled to be raised to the surface, your aching eardrums warning you that you had been down too long.

As you ascended, regulating the valve in your helmet, pausing now and then for the necessary minutes of adjustment to decreasing pressure, your mind came back into your body, and you were no longer a symbol of mankind, but an individual man. Your identity came back with horrible pain.

II.

HOGAN and Quong removed John Dariel's helmet, helped him over the edge of the raft and got him out of his heavy rubber

suit. He did not ask whether he had sent up any gold that day; none of the others thought it necessary to tell him he had not.

"How you comin' down there?" Evans asked as they filed across the pontoon bridge.

"Ought to get through with this length of casing to-morrow. Better get the next one ready."

The next day he sent gold up.

Grubbing away in his under-water hole, his mind apart as usual, he was abruptly jolted into awareness by the stopping of his air supply. Seconds seemed hours with no air buzzing through his helmet—then it started again. And immediately the life line tugged twice at his girdle: the signal to come up.

He rose slowly, weighing, one against the other, the two most probable causes of this break in the day's work: either the water wheel had got out of order, or the men had decided to quit. But as soon as he reached the surface he knew that he had sent up gold.

Hogan unscrewed the diving helmet; a wheezing, sweating Hogan whose fat, red face was egg shaped with the breath of its grin. He slapped Dariel on the back with a thick hand and yelled into his face: "We got it, John! We got it! Big, greasy lumps of it!"

Standing on one of the tree bodies that supported the sluice box, Evans and the Chinese, shoulder to shoulder, were stirring its contents with their fingers. Evans's weak face was pink and utterly happy, and though Quong's features told nothing, his overalled legs were quivering as with chill. Dariel dragged his leaden shoes toward them. He felt no elation, no joy. The world should have been a different, a lighter, gayer world; but it was not. It was the same world in which he had fought the creek with ineffectual weapons.

He had won—or was about to win—but there was no happiness in it. A savage triumph, a brutal satisfaction, but not happiness. For a flashing moment he regretted his loss, felt an emptiness, then regret was gone. Happiness was well enough for these others, the cheap tools in spite of which he had beaten the creek; happiness went well with their worthlessness.

He leaned over and looked into the sluice box. Against the cross strips were little slopes of gritty sediment that glistened with yellow points: miniature snowdrifts of black and gold against miniature fences.

Evans was sputtering excitedly, saliva bubbling in the corners of his loose mouth.

"Must be five thousand dollars there if there's a nickel: just out of that last can! I bet you we'll—"

Hogan was puffing and babbling over the diver's shoulder. Quong's eyes were slitted black lights. Dariel stepped back upon the raft. Fools, fools, fools, gloating childishly over his gold.

He spoke harshly, for the first time in weeks without effort to keep hatred out of his voice:

"Hogan, you and Evans get the dust out of there. Quong, get ready to go to Apple. Take both horses. I'll give you some of the gold. Get a two-weeks' supply of grub. Get the grub as soon as you reach there so you can start back at daylight."

The two white men stared at him with slack chins and round, astonished eyes. He turned away and began to get out of the diving suit. Fools who thought he should be chattering and giggling with a silliness to match their own! He went up to the cabin, leaving them to separate the gold from the sand and gravel.

"John ain't such a durned good winner, either," Hogan said, whistling softly.

All of the late afternoon John Dariel sat on an empty box in front of the cabin, staring across the creek at the hills, while from behind the building came the ringing of hammers on iron, and the excited voices of Hogan and Evans. They spent money recklessly in distant cities while they prepared the casing within which the diver would go deeper into the earth to-morrow.

Dariel spent no gold in his mind. He dug gold out of the creek; dug it not so much for its value as for the vicious joy it gave him to take it away from the guarding water. He personified the creek so that it might feel pain when he gouged the metal from its intestines, pain that would be intensified because he worked with clumsy, bunglesome implements.

After a while the hammering stopped and

the two laborers came around the corner of the cabin to sprawl on the ground beside Dariel.

"She's all set for to-morrow," Evans announced.

Dariel nodded without speaking. He wished these two cheap tools would go away from him with their excessively bright eyes and their elation over the wealth he was taking from the creek in spite of them.

Hogan hunched his fat body nearer.

"How long you think it'll take to clean 'er up?" he asked, his thick lips moist.

"Three or four days," Dariel growled, and added, reluctantly, "or maybe less. I'm down in loose gravel now."

"And then—" Hogan chucked a pebble at Evans and laughed boisterously.

"And then—" Evans repeated, and laughed.

Until bedtime Hogan and Evans talked without pause, of money, of how it could be spent to the maximum enjoyment; a gay verbal wasting of the hoard that had cost John Dariel all his own capacity for happiness. He lay on his bunk with closed eyes, listening and hating.

All three arose early the next morning, and the two laborers resumed their game of profligacy. The Chinese would not be back with the provisions until ten o'clock at the earliest; so Dariel put his two helpers to work preparing another length of casing, that there might be no delay.

"This will be the last one," he told them. "Even if I don't get down to bed-rock in it I'll have to stop. The next would be too small to work in."

Their share of the gold seemed to become visible to them in this last piece of tubing; their hammers beat upon it with a rapid rhythm that had never been in their work before, and above the clangor sounded gusts of laughter and fragments of song.

The morning passed and Quong did not return. Hogan and Evans, their work done, sat on a boulder from which they could watch the trail. Evans burned cigarettes one after the other and his lank frame fidgeted with new-found impatience. Beside him, Hogan wheezed around his black pipe and wiped the perspiration from his bald head with a faded shirt-sleeve. They looked

down the trail steadily, and took turns damning the Chinese.

It was early afternoon when Quong rode up the trail. His face was gray under its dark skin, and his mouth was not so much sourly drawn down as drooping. His clothes were dirt-caked; he got stiffly down from his horse, but the one he led was full-packed with food.

"What's the matter?" Evans demanded. The Chinese ignored the tall man and turned to where Dariel was coming from the cabin.

"Dam' hoss fallum off blidge. Go down. Bimeby ketchum. Wet lika hell. Leumatism—bad."

He rubbed one hip.

"Get the horse unpacked and something for us to eat," the diver said, and went back to the cabin.

Mid-afternoon found Dariel under water again. An hour's work got the new length of casing in place, and the can began to travel up and down through the water. He worked now in loose gravel that made his task the simple one of filling the can, sending it up, driving the casing down, scooping up another canful of gravel—

His mind did not go away from his body to-day; the thought of nothing except his immediate task. This oneness was paid for by full consciousness of the pains that racked his frame; his chest burned with suffocating fire, his head spun, each muscle seemed to tear as he used it. He worked with a haste that kept him panting.

When he came up to the raft, the bare wooden cleats in the sluice-box were as tractor-prints in a golden road.

That evening he found a change in Hogan and Evans. Their eyes still were bright, but some of their hilarity was gone; they didn't laugh so much; they were thoughtful. Later he saw them walking together, along the creek in twilight, talking. When they came indoors for the inevitable cribbage game he found speculation in their eyes. They glanced past their cards at him, surreptitiously. Presently the fire in his pipe died, and he felt in his pocket for a match. Hogan dropped his cards, struck a match on his overalls, and held it over the pipe.

"Thanks." The diver put no gratitude in the word.

All next day Hogan and Evans fawned upon their employer, awkwardly trying to anticipate his desires, and between times they studied him with hard, bright eyes. Dariel, understanding, drove them with untempered harshness, gave them sneering thanks, or none, for their courtesies, and kept them silent with contemptuous aloofness. He understood them: they wanted more of his gold. They had bargained for fifteen dollars a day, and now they wanted more. Given the least encouragement, they could come out with it: a wheedling suggestion that they be given a bonus for their worthlessness. He knew them: greedy for the gold he was taking from the creek.

When he got the last of the find, when the basin's pocket was empty, he would give them their chance. He would listen to their pleas; and then he would speak for himself. He would tell them all that these bitter months had told him. He would give them every cent he had promised them, and not a cent more. He would brew out of his hatred an eloquence that could burn through the thickness of their hides, and make them for once see themselves with honest eyes. Until then he fended them off.

Meanwhile they took gold from the creek, took it out in a can that came up twisted and bulging around its burden; washed the gold, packed it in oil cans, and sank them in the stream below the raft, where they would be safe from chance prowlers. By the end of the third day, four cans were grouped on the stream-bottom; four cans that held more than a hundred pounds of smooth-grained gold apiece.

Over seventy thousand dollars. His.

Each day Dariel went down into his iron well for four hours. Except when he dragged himself to table, he spent the rest of his days and nights on his bunk. Toward the last he was but dimly aware of the others—the fawning fat Hogan, the fawning slender Evans, and the silent Chinese. Only his hatred kept him conscious of them at all. The world was bereft of sounds—the ceaseless pulsation in his ears alone was audible—and he saw the men as dim

shadows moving purposelessly before him, often indistinguishable one from the other. They told him when it was time to eat, to go down into the blackness.

On his third daily descent after Quong's return from Apple, Dariel found the two bottom lengths of casing askew; the loose gravel around them had shifted, and they were bent at their common joint. The job was done. The buckling tube would not hold for long, and when it went the gravel would close in smoothly, quickly, a smothering pressure that no suit made for man could withstand. He had enough gold; he had beaten the creek; let it get what triumph it could out of saving that last shovel-ful in the bottom of the pocket!

He yanked the life-line twice, the signal for ascent—and his air stopped.

Mechanically closing the exhaust in his helmet so that his suit would hold what air it contained, he waited. Seconds passed, no air came. He jerked the hose in the double signal for more air. None came. He pulled at the life-line, the upper end of which should have been fastened to the raft; the rope came down slack in his hands.

With fumbling fingers he unfastened his weight-belt and let it fall away from him. Then he filled his lungs with the weak, stuffy air in his suit, and started for the surface. Bare fingers and heavy shoes found purchase on the lips of the jointed casing and lifted him up, length by length, to the creek-bed. There, one arm found the guide-rope, and it was taut. The stored air in his suit was no longer weak; it scored his lungs as if glass-dust floated in it.

He went up the guide-rope, hand over hand, fighting currents that bent him downstream. The foot of the ladder: firm wood for hands and feet. He could make the raft now—if an accident to pump or water-wheel had stopped his air. But if cheap tools had become treacherous tools.

He went up the ladder. The edge of the raft was under one hand; under the other. Water dropped away from his face-plate. His chest was over the raft's edge; he crawled, scrabbled, came up on his knees.

Thin air of the upper world starved lungs that had been fed on heavy stuff. He tore at his face-plate; got it loose. He swayed,

the sharp cough of strangulation tore his chest. The raft whirled under him. Something like a man lay prone before him. A face moved somewhere; and sunlight glinted on bright metal. An invisible club struck him everywhere at once.

III.

DARIEL awoke in the dull light of the coal-oil lamp that hung from the cabin's ceiling. His naked body was wrapped in blankets, and he was on his bunk. His head swelled and shrank to the beat of some pulsing thing inside; pin-points of fire tortured his skin.

He groaned, and a shadow detached itself from the other shadows in the cabin. Although the shadow came close to him, it spoke from a distance.

"Well, John, are you comin' around all right?"

The shadow's voice was a dim echo of Hogan's.

Dariel tried to sit up, but the shadow pushed him down with a fat, tangible hand.

"Now you lay still, John, an' I'll tell you about it. It was that damn chink!" There was bitterness in Hogan's voice, as if he had learned not to smile at defeat. "He came up here right after you went under the water—to get tobacco, he said. An' then—I'm at the pump, and Evans fooling with the sluice; an' a gun goes off and a bullet plunks into the raft at my feet.

"Me and Evans both looks up an' on the top of the cliff there's three hombres and the chink. He's grinnin' for the first time I ever seen him grin. The rest of 'em has rags over their faces an' guns in their hands.

"Stick 'em up,' one of 'em says, and me an' Evans stick 'em up.

"Then I remember you, an' I grab the pump.

"Stick 'em up,' the fellow says again.

"There's a man down there,' I yells at him.

"The hell with him,' he says. 'Let him rest.'

"I don't know what to do about that. It seems unreasonable; so I keep on tryin' to pump, only there was somethin' the matter with the water-wheel and I couldn't get

it goin'. Anyways, after I try a while I got to stop; 'cause the second time that pole-cat on the bank pops at me he gets me in the leg, an' I can't stand up no more.

"I didn't see all the rest: I was sort of spread out on my face. I don't know how come Evans got his, but they plugged him in the side. Then the chink an' one of the others come down an' the chink shows 'em where we'd sunk the gold, and they pulls 'em up. You came over the edge somewheres along in there, but you flopped before they could get a shot at you, so they let it go at that.

"After they left, me an' Evans got you up here an' put you to bed. You was in pretty tough shape, so I tied Evans's side up, an' he lit out for Apple, to get a doc an' turn the sheriff loose after them jaspers. He had to go on foot—the chink an' his playmates took both hosses—but he said he could make it. I don't know: he's got a busted rib. I guess if he gets down to the county road somebody'll pick him up."

Dariel giggled, pushed away the hand that tried to hold him down, and sat up. His body rocked and he laughed aloud—a long ululant laugh that mocked every conception of victory, derided all men who thought to win their fights. He stopped laughing, fell back among the blankets and was asleep.

When he awakened again his head was clear. The lantern still burned smokily against the ceiling. In an opposite bunk, Hogan slept uneasily, clumsy bandages bulging around one stiffly held fat leg. His face was purplish.

Then Dariel discovered that something gripped his shoulder, dug into his aching flesh. A thing stood beside his bed, trying to shake him: a thing that was the size of a man. Instead of features and skin and clothing this thing had mud and slime, black and dark brown and green, smeared here and there with spreading blotches of red.

Out of the thing came Quong's voice.

"You get go-down-in-watah-suit. You ketchum. I show you."

Dariel pulled his shoulder out of the thing's grasp and edged back against the log-wall, sitting up.

Quong's words came in the metallic tone peculiar to guttural voices when high-pitched with hysteria, and he chanted rather than spoke:

"I bling 'em; I take 'em. I go to town; I get dlunk; I talk. Talk this-a-one, talk that-a-one. Bimeby I come cabin fo' bacca. Thlee men in cabin. Got guns; got guns push at me. Got hid faces; one face come not hid. I see 'em; I know 'em. I see 'em in town when I dlunk. I talk, maybe. Maybe talk bling 'em heah. All light! my blame!

"You go down in watah; fat man, skinny man on laft. What can do? Nothing. I fix 'em. I make fliends. Gold hid, I tell 'em; no can find. I get some, I find. Thlee men talk; they say all light. I savvy: they get gold, they take me little ways; bimeby kill me. I savvy. I make fliends.

"Put gold on hosses. I go little ways all same them. Bimeby come blidge. South Fo'k blidge, you savvy. Bad! I lead 'em hoss. Tlouble on blidge. Too much tlouble. One hoss, two hoss, dlop in watah. I dlop in watah. Gold dlop in watah. Gold come off hoss. What can do? Nothing—then. I swim—ketchum shot in back. I swim all same. Hide. They look; no find 'em. Bimeby stop looking. I come home. You got go-down-in-watah-suit; you ketchum gold. I show you. Quong bling 'em men; Quong bling 'em gold; Quong—"

The sing-song voice flickered, died; the Chinese slid down in a slimy heap on the dirt floor. Hogan, stirring and breathing unevenly, still slept on the other side of the room. The suspended lantern burned smokily. The diver's face began to glow red in the dim light.

He looked at the fat man with the bandaged leg: fat Hogan, who stayed at the pump until shot down. He looked at Evans's empty bunk: Evans, starting down fifteen miles of jagged trail with the ends of a broken rib grating together in his side. He looked at the crumpled Chinese on the floor. And as the diver looked, something cringed in his eyes. He slid his feet over the edge of the bunk and stood up—naked.

"Cheap tools," he said thickly, and bent to pick up the Chinese.



The Next Victim.

By RONALD PRINCE

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II

MICAH THURMM, whose finger-prints, found at scenes of successful crimes, indicate that he has been operating undetected for forty years, demands by letter that Billings, a millionaire, throw overboard at a designated time, ten miles off Westhampton, Long Island, a box containing one million dollars. As an indication of his power and determination Thrumm has murdered Arrunsdale, a broker who disregarded his command.

The narrator of the story, a friend of Billings, calls in his nephew, Billy, an amateur criminologist, and they plan to trap Micah Thrumm. With an empty box the yacht Marriatt puts to sea. Billings, his daughter Alice, Billy, old Ripley, an acquaintance they have reason to suspect, his nephew Herrickson, Simpson Vallance and Sturtevant Wyeth, two of Alice's suitors, and the man who tells the story, are on board. Smith, a new radio operator, joins the ship at the last minute.

When Captain Wickstrom is informed that a murderer is on board he decides to confine Billings to his cabin under guard of Bickers, his first officer. As Bickers opens the stateroom door he is stabbed by a man who rushes out and disappears. Search fails to disclose Thrumm. When the narrator of the story goes to his own cabin he finds there a note from the murderer telling him he is the next victim, and demanding a million dollars to be left under the same conditions at sea a week later.

CHAPTER XIV.

CRESCENDO.

WITH the letter from Micah Thrumm exciting the beats of my heart, I requested Captain Wickstrom to relate the cause of his worry. At its worst, I felt, it could never equal my own.

"It iss about the tamned engines," he announced.

"Some further delay in fixing them?"

Captain Wickstrom gave me a look with large eyes that were exceedingly grave.

"They will not be fixed at all," he said.

I reflected his gravity.

"We will haff to go into the yards."

"And we can't—under our own power?"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 24.

"No. There iss no immediate danger. We are riding well and the worst of the storm iss already over. The first blow was the hardest. I haff decided to send for a tug by wireless. I wish also to haff her bring a good surgeon. I believe that Mr. Bickers should haff expert medical attention at once."

"By all means!"

"I wished you to confirm the matter of expense, also to ask your advice as for whom to send."

I mentioned my family physician and felt assured that he would come at my request.

"But hadn't we better call some passing ship?" I suggested.

"There iss no liner within reach who could get to us before a tug from the city. I go. There iss need for haste."

He left me with the added worry of the first officer's condition on my already overwrought mind. What a mess the whole affair had turned out to be! I shuddered at the futility of it all, at our conceit in having imagined that we, in our colossal inexperience, could handle it. It had gone beyond us and we were helpless in its hands.

Destiny, Micah Thrumm had called himself, and destiny he seemed to be indeed. Bickers' life swung in the balance—Billings' life—and my own. It suddenly occurred to me that there was no reason at all why I should not tell Billings of Micah Thrumm's letter to me. He already was under the shadow of the man's threat—I could confide in him without doing further harm. It would also accentuate his vigilance. I started for the door when it was suddenly burst open and Captain Wickstrom confronted me again.

"I knew this morning that I was right," he said fiercely. "They are no goot. The lot of them! The wireless set iss smashed."

"Smashed?"

"I do not know exactly, but it will not work. As for that Smith, he does not know at all. He says somebody hass been making monkey business with it."

"You mean we can't send for a tug?"

"I mean we can send for nothing. If we should sink this minute, we should do

it without a word. When I think—when I *think* of the foolishness of mankind! For years and years and years men haff been sailing the seas in peace and in content, and then some wretched fellow comes along and we should haff wireless. What iss more, we haff come to rely on the tamn thing. We are helpless without it. We cannot even sink in peace without it. And when we want it—*now*—where iss it? It iss bust!"

"Perhaps he can fix it?"

"Nefer! We must content ourselves with shooting rockets, to attract some passing ship. There will be salvage."

"It doesn't matter. No matter what the expense we must try to save Bickers's life."

"I knew you would feel that way. I shall have the rockets prepared at once."

I no longer attempted to keep pace with the surge of events. They had overtaken me. They had overwhelmed me. My mind was a confused blur. I began to appreciate the viewpoint of the fatalist: what was to be, was to be, and nothing could be done about it. It scarcely made any impression at all when the steward came to my cabin and informed me that my guests, with the exception of Alice, Billings, and my nephew had succumbed to the strong motion of the yacht in the tumultuous seas and were seasick to a man. They were confined, he informed me, already to their beds, wanted no dinner, and indirectly hinted that their one uppermost desire was to be set, as speedily as possible, ashore.

I gave him abstract instructions to attend as well as he could to their wants and vaguely ticketed a mental memorandum that it was my duty as their host to visit each one of them and offer consolation. But that would have to wait. I must confer with Billings at once. I must stay with him continuously. Guard him.

I did not find him in his cabin. I went to the saloon. He was there in the company of my nephew and Alice. Alice sat beside her father on the lounge, holding his hand. My nephew sat nearby. They were not speaking. Billings stared straight ahead and his eyes looked tired. I knew that he was thinking of the future; that the whole direful business would have to be

gone through with again; of the suspense and mental torture that would be his when we set foot ashore. It would be a nightmare of constant alarm. Of starting at shadows and, undoubtedly, at substances more real and infinitely more menacing.

"Bickers?" I said, joining them.

Alice answered me briefly. "He has a chance," she said, "I've done everything I could. We're getting help, I suppose?"

I explained the disaster to the wireless, the complete breakdown of our engines, and the fact that Captain Wickstrom was preparing to shoot rockets of distress.

"Perhaps," I concluded, "he has already done so."

I crossed to a porthole and looked out upon the black curtain behind which hung the starless heavens and lay the invisible sea. Even as I tried to pierce the darkness with my eyes a spear of molten gold shafted upwards in a tall arc and there hung suspended in the air, at its burst, a cluster of scarlet stars.

The steward announced that dinner was served and, seeing no opportunity for drawing Billings aside to inform him of Micah Thrumm's letter without arousing the curiosity of Alice or my nephew, we passed in silence into the dining saloon and took our places at the table.

We made no effort to mask the strain that we were under. With our guests confined to their cabins there was no need of maintaining any air of artificial calm or gayety. One thought, and one alone, filled all our minds: Micah Thrumm.

"I've been wondering," said my nephew, during an absence on the part of the steward between courses, "if there isn't some connection between the breakdown of the engines, of the wireless set, and Micah Thrumm. We must remember that we are in the approximate position that he designated in his letter as the rendezvous for to-night. There is a chance that he is still on board. That he wishes us to remain in this locality for a special purpose. Perhaps he expects some ship of his own to be here at midnight—some ship to which he will swim and so make good his escape."

I seized the explanation eagerly, as a handle upon which I could hang my own

suspicion that the assassin was still with us; my suspicions that had been fostered by the receiving of his letter to myself. I voiced my agreement and added a strong opinion that we should be more carefully than ever upon our guard.

"I would advise," I said to Billings, "that immediately after we have finished dinner you join me in my cabin. That we stay there until we reach port."

"Just as you wish," said Billings.

There was a listless quality in his voice, as if he, too, were becoming fatalistic. He was seated upon my left. Alice was upon my right, with my nephew alongside of her. We were using one end of the longish table that ran fore and aft along the saloon. The steward had departed for coffee. The door leading to the pantry was closed, as was the door directly in back of my chair which led to the passage. We were alone. I looked at my nephew in the hope that he would back up my advice. I caught a brief glimpse of a puzzled frown upon his face, of his eyes staring sharply at something behind me, of his lips which were just opening to speak, when the lights went out.

The fact that the lights should suddenly go out did not, immediately, either astonish or alarm me. With the engines disabled, nothing was more likely than that the dynamo that fed the lighting system should have become disabled, too.

"The steward," I said confidently, "will shortly bring lamps. I imagine that—"

"Hush!" warned the voice of my nephew from the darkness. It was a bare whisper, but it reached like so many knife thrusts my startled nerves. "There's something wrong here—Micah Thrumm is *in this saloon!*"

CHAPTER XV.

THE DAGGER.

AS the door to the passage was directly behind my chair I had failed to observe what my nephew had been staring at and which he later described to me—the slight opening of that door—the insertion of a hand that had felt for the light switch—then the darkness.

I sat, frankly, stunned, incapable of motion or of thought, while the fear that my nephew's whispered words had aroused in me, caused my body to break out in a chill sweat. My muscles were clamped in tight bands. It seemed an eternity; in reality it could not have been for longer than three seconds.

Then I heard a thump as if a chair had been overturned—a stifled scream from Alice—a confused noise like the sound of a scuffle from Billings—the sharp whispering of my nephew's voice followed by a cessation of the scuffling sound—then heavy, sterterous breathing which I judged to be Billings and which grew fainter as if it were moving away from me toward the further corners of the saloon—

"Billings!" I called out. "Where are you?"

I reached a hand to my left, where he had been sitting, and encountered nothing. Then, from a distance, came a single word like the flick of a breeze from my nephew. It was "Silence!"

I could not stand the tension. I stumbled to my feet, and with my hands outstretched before me, managed to reach the passage door. I grasped its handle and pulled. It was locked. The key was not in the lock. The key was gone. From without came the muffled sighing of the sea—the swirl of heavy waters—while within could be distinctly heard, in the unutterable stillness that clung like thick terror in the dark, the sound of that sterterous breathing.

And then, as the seconds passed, the sound of something else.

It was not so much a sound as it was a sensation—a sensation, if I can put it into words, of scraping—of some one scraping a foot slowly, quietly across the floor.

"Lights!" said the voice of my nephew. "Turn on the lights!"

I felt for the switch in the paneling beside the door. I knew exactly where it was and, putting out my forefinger, I pressed. I cried out and drew my hand sharply away. The point of some sharp instrument had pricked it.

"The door's locked," I said. "The switch—something is the matter with the switch—it—"

My voice dribbled out in the silence that choked me in a swelter of fear.

"Got a match?" said my nephew—and I noted that his voice was always coming from a different place in the saloon. "Strike one—strike one quick!"

"I have," I said, stupidly fumbling with trembling fingers in my pockets.

"Quick!"

My fingers almost refused to function. Pocket after pocket proved empty. Then, in the pocket of my waistcoat, I found them. I jerked out the paper packet and with my fingers trembling more badly than ever tore off a match. It was the worst shock I had ever received in my life to feel cold fingers close with a viselike grip about my wrist, and others wrench the packet from my hand; to feel a hot breath sear into my ear and whisper, with dire significance, the word "Remember!"

Then again I heard the scraping on the floor.

I plunged in its direction. My arms folded around nothing. A chair caught me and sent me crashing to the floor.

"Here! Over here—!"

It was the voice of Billings.

"Coming!" called my nephew, and there was the rush of his feet.

"Ah!" said Billings. "I—save m—"

Silence.

Five seconds of silence.

Then lights.

As suddenly as they had gone out, they flooded the saloon again. Every eye was riveted upon Billings—upon Billings who stood flat against the paneling of the port bulkhead—the handle of a dagger protruding from beneath his left arm. He swayed. He fell.

And the door to the passage swung, with the rolling, idly to and fro.

CHAPTER XVI.

A GLEAM OF LIGHT.

WE were at Billings's side in an instant—Alice and I. My nephew was gone. More quickly than any of us he had caught the significance of the idly swaying door and, with a shout, had

dashed from the saloon in full chase of Micah Thrumm.

Alice kept remarkable control of herself. Her face was the color of ash and was drawn looking. She was on her knees in an instant and had pillowed her father's head in her lap. She slipped her hand beneath his jacket, then drew it back with its fingers tipped with blood. For a moment I feared she was going to faint, but she closed her eyes tightly and, with a desperate effort, held on to herself.

I stood by like a fool. I had drawn my revolver and was holding it in readiness.

"We must get off this coat," Alice said. Her voice reacted like ice upon my nerves and in an instant I was kneeling, too. Together we managed to remove Billings's jacket. The shirt, below his left armpit, was stained with blood. I then noticed that Billings was still breathing. With deliberate fingers, while her face grew unbelievably pale, Alice delicately took hold of the shirt and pulled a long rip in it. Then she examined the wound. I could see that it was a superficial one. She saw so, too.

"It isn't serious," she said. "The knife just glanced beneath the skin. There's nothing to worry about—worry—perhaps infection—"

The strain was too much. She fainted.

I managed to bring her to with water. Billings also had partially revived. I wondered at the absence of the steward. He had gone for coffee. He must have joined in the search for Micah Thrumm. I asked Alice whether she felt strong enough to help me get her father to his cabin. She said that she could. Billings's eyes were open and he was mumbling dazedly to himself. But he must have known what we were about, for he assisted us in a clumsy fashion and the three of us stumbled down the passage and into my cabin, where he fell back heavily upon the bed.

"I will go up to the captain's quarters and get dressing," said Alice. "You'll stay until I come back?"

She took my reply for granted and left the cabin. I sat beside Billings, dividing my attention between his pallid face and the cabin door. Again, in my hand was the revolver.

"Sorry," Billings muttered. "Sorry to give way like this."

Then he closed his eyes again.

Alice returned shortly and I helped her to dress the wound. When it was done a good deal of color had returned to her cheeks and I could see that her nerves were well in hand.

"If I leave you now to join in the search," I said, "will you lock the door and only open it if you recognize the voice of whoever knocks? There is a gun in your father's pocket and I believe that you will be quite safe in here."

Alice readily consented. We found Billings's gun in the side pocket of the jacket we had taken off. I examined it to see that it was properly loaded and then gave it to Alice. Then I went out on deck to find out what progress had been made in the chase after the assassin.

It was a scene of confusion—of shouts—of men rushing singly and in groups along the deck. Every one, except those on duty, was involved. But it was futile. As futile as our previous searches had been. Micah Thrumm had vanished as completely as if he had plunged in some cabalistic fashion straight into the blackness of the night.

Captain Wickstrom was outspokenly enraged. "It iss worse than the deffil," he said. "I do not like chases. No. They are not orderly and are not goot for the discipline of the crew. It should get them into bad habits. And above all chasings I hate ones in which there should be found nobody to chase. We shall chase no more. It iss finished. I shall post guards for the night until assistance comes. Then we will wait for this mad flea to make exposure of himself to us. Yess!"

And so it was arranged. Besides those in the possession of Billings, my nephew, and myself, there were heavy automatics on board for each of the officers. There were also some assorted rifles and guns in a locked case in the library. These were loaded and apportioned among the cooler heads of the crew. The rest were furnished with fire axes, slice bars and belaying pins.

It was an impressive array and the Marriat after the posting of the men resembled an armed camp. Every passage, alley, deck

and door had its guard. Looking back upon the whole business now, I can never get over being surprised at our stupid recurrences of confidence; at our almost criminal blindness to the true source of the peril that menaced us throughout that terrible affair!

I suggested to my nephew the probability of our finding finger-prints upon the handle of the dagger, which had clattered to the floor of the dining saloon and had not been touched. We did not doubt, of course, whose prints they would be. We found it still lying where it had fallen. My nephew looked down at it, then knelt to examine it without touching it.

He stared at it intently. His brow was creased with a frown. "I'm trying to think," he said, "trying to catch something that's in my mind—"

"About the dagger?"

"Something—I have it! I've seen *this dagger before!*"

CHAPTER XVII.

BLIND ARROWS.

WHAT happened during the ensuing three quarters of an hour is a curious example of what can best be called directional muddling—a blind striking after immediate clews each one of which seemed diametrically opposed to any reasonable solution of the mystery and yet all of which fell into their appointed places when the true answer came, as it did, in an inspirational flash to my nephew.

The two leads of greatest importance, my nephew informed me, pointed to Smith. He expounded his views on the subject as he inspected the finger-prints on the handle of the dagger, which turned out, as we had expected, to be those of Micah Thrumm.

"I do not believe," he said, "that Smith knows anything about wireless at all. I don't believe he has ever been a wireless operator; nor do I believe that there is anything the matter with the set—beyond the fact that he doesn't know how to operate it. The only message he pretends to have sent is that fake one of mine to Timmins."

"Smith knew no answer was required, so

he was perfectly safe in saying that he had gotten it off: But when Captain Wickstrom wanted to send for a tug—a message that would require an answer at once—what was the result? An announcement that the set was out of order and wouldn't work."

"I don't see why he couldn't have made up an answer concerning the tug."

"He didn't dare. He wouldn't feel sure of his ground. A wrong statement or two and Captain Wickstrom would get suspicious. It was much easier just to wreck the set. I believe he is Micah Thrumm's accomplice."

"Any proof of it?"

"Not beyond the fact that the dagger that almost killed Mr. Billings belongs to him. I saw it lying on his desk when I sent the message to Timmins."

"That seems pretty obvious."

"Too much so. Almost too much so to be probable. However it must be investigated at once. First we will find out whether the set is really out of order or not."

"How can you? You don't know anything about wireless, do you?"

"No; but I went around asking who did."

"And does any one?"

"Yes. Vallance."

"The young architect? But he's sick."

"I know he's sick. He runs out to the rail every five minutes. He's made an awful mess of his cabin and the steward's so busy with the crowd of other sick ones on his hands that he hasn't had time to clean up."

"But you can hardly expect a man in his condition to work on a wireless set."

"I've explained to him how grave the situation is and he's willing to help."

"Pretty sporty of him."

"Yes, it is. We'll pick him up on the way to the wireless room."

We almost had to do so literally, for Vallance, when we reached his bedside, stifled a groan and smiled up at us weakly.

"Feeling better, old man?" asked my nephew.

"What's left of me," whispered Vallance.

"Think you can stand up? I want you to try out that wireless set now, if you can."

"Well," Vallance gingerly lowered a foot over the side of his bed and followed it by the other, "we can only die once, you know. Personally I think that the statement is a delusion and a snare. I've died twenty times if I've died once in the past hour."

We flanked him on either side and it was a slow and halting procession which took us fully five minutes to reach the wireless room.

My nephew assisted Vallance through the door and propped him up against a bulkhead. "I've brought an expert to help you," he said to Smith.

Smith, who was covered with grease, sat on the floor surrounded by various parts of the wireless transmitter. He took a lowering look at Vallance.

"All right, sir," he said. "Let him go to it."

Smith stood up and nodded briefly toward the confusion of parts.

"It seems all apart," said Vallance weakly, as he staggered across the intervening space and leaned heavily against the set's panel.

"Yes," said Smith briefly. "It does."

Vallance, making a great effort, bent down to pick up some section of the set's mechanism that interested him.

"Look out, sir," warned Smith. "That black goo is grease."

A palsied look came over young Vallance's face. "Goo?" he murmured faintly. "Grease?"

I held the door open and carefully warned him to look out for the ladder head as he plunged past me and made for the rail.

"The gentleman is sick, sir?" said Smith.

"As sick as your set," said my nephew.

"It's on the blink for good, sir. I've been at it for the past hour and haven't been able to shoot the trouble yet."

"I understand from Captain Wickstrom," said my nephew, "that some one tampered with it. Isn't that what you told him?"

"Yes, sir."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, the hurricane damaged the aerial a bit and I had to go aft to fix a spreader.

When I got back here I listened in for a minute or two and picked up a call from New London. They were trying to get us with a message. I guess it was in answer to the one I sent for you, sir."

"Then you did send it?"

Smith looked faintly surprised. "As soon as the siren stopped," he said.

"Oh," said my nephew.

"I slapped the switches in to tell New London to go ahead, but she didn't work. Nothing happened at all. Fuses seemed O K—juice from the main line all right—nothing wrong that you could lay your hand on easy—but there was nothing doing. This seemed strange, as well as making me feel sore, what with having New London growling his head off for me and me not being able to answer. What's more, the pesky set was working like a Rolls Royce not fifteen minutes before."

"Yes?" said my nephew briefly.

"Yes, sir, running sweet as a breeze. Right away I felt that something was up—you know, had a presentiment like. I even began to feel creepy—as if there had just been some one in the shack who had either left it just before I entered, or else was still here."

"I suppose you looked around?"

"You bet I did."

"And there was no one here?"

"You guessed it." Smith paused for a moment and then looked obliquely at my nephew from slanting eyes. Then he added, almost hesitantly, "Some one had been, though."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Because he'd swiped my knife."

My nephew shot me a significant look.

"Knife?"

"Yes, sir—more of a dagger than a knife. Regular wop toad-stabber. Picked it up in Napoli and have carted it around with me ever since. Well, I know I'd left it lying on the top of my desk when I went on deck to fix the spreader. When I looked around, after coming back, I saw it was gone. Made me feel jumpy."

My nephew looked steadily at Smith.

"Did it have a bone handle with a silver shield, and a thin blade about eight inches long?" he asked.

Smith looked at my nephew with veiled eyes.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Did you find it?"

"I did."

It was a second or two before Smith said, "Where?"

"Sticking in a panel, Mr. Smith—just about six inches from Mr. Billings's heart."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CLEW.

"WHOSE heart, sir?" said Smith slowly, as he paled a little and after a startled pause.

"Mr. Billings's."

"One of the guests, sir?"

"One of the guests."

"Dead?"

"No, not dead. But wounded."

"Then whoever gypped the sticker from me tried to kill him?"

"Such is the case."

"Gosh," said Smith simply, "it might have been me."

This was a distinctly equivocal statement. One could infer from it that the "it" it contained might refer to Smith either as a potential victim of his own knife, or as an equally potential assassin with his own knife. I could not fathom the man at all. If duplicity existed it was of a superlative quality and kind. His manner was natural and accorded exactly with the way any innocent person would have acted under the circumstance.

"When did it happen, sir?"

Even this question accorded with innocence. It was more than probable that Captain Wickstrom had left the wireless man severely alone both as to utilizing him during the past searches and as to having given him any information concerning their purpose.

"Where have you been for the past half hour?" asked my nephew.

"Right here, sir. Working on the set."

"You didn't have this cabin at all?"

"Been right here all the time. Got to stay here, too. Captain's orders. No grub for me until the set is fixed."

This certainly accorded with perfect inno-

cence. We were foolish, I believed, in considering the man to be in any way involved. Evidently my nephew was beginning to think similarly.

"Did you find anything else that showed some one had been here while you were fixing the spreader?" he asked.

"Nothing but the fact that the set wouldn't work. And what he did to it I don't know. I'll admit it's got me buffaloed."

"Well," my nephew stared thoughtfully around. "I'll just take a look and see if there is anything that you may have missed—any sign—"

"All right, sir."

Smith returned to his labors. I could see, nevertheless, that in spite of the concentration he was bending upon his work he kept shooting a good many wary glances from the tail of his eye at my nephew.

The inspection of the cabin proved unproductive of interest until the moment when my nephew suddenly brought his magnifying glass to play upon the tip of a sharp spike that was used for the filing of papers, and which stood upon the operating desk. After a minute inspection he took a clean sheet of paper, wiped it over the end of the tip—holding the spike upside down—carefully folded the paper, inserted it in an envelope, sealed it, and put it in his pocket.

"Found something?" I asked.

He gave me a sharp look and mumbled something beneath his breath that I could not catch. But I gathered that my question had been indiscreet.

For the next ten minutes the investigation proceeded around the wireless room and extended itself through the sleeping quarters of Smith, where neither the drawers to his lockers nor the secrets of his clothes press were immune from search.

"All right," he said at last. "There is nothing more to be gained by staying here."

"Did you come across anything, sir?" asked Smith as we moved to depart.

"Only a speck," said my nephew, "and there is no telling as yet whether it is of any importance or not."

The words were light, and our reception of them was lighter. But heavy indeed was the emphasis placed on that insignifi-

cant thing which my nephew called a 'speck' when the dénouement came. And how wise he had been, as I later plainly realized, not to have given his confidence even to me!

We found young Vallance clinging to a stanchion and leaning heavily against the rail.

"Sorry," he said weakly; "sorry I couldn't have been of help."

"That's perfectly all right," said my nephew. "I very much doubt whether you could have accomplished a thing this side of several hours. That set looks like a Christmas tree on the 2nd of January."

"Find any clues?"

"Nothing to speak of—just a speck."

"Speck?"

"Yes. I don't know what it is yet myself."

"Can I do anything else to help? Not that I've done anything as yet—but if I can't," Vallance added with eagerness, "I'll go back to my cabin and lie down."

"By all means do."

"You shouldn't have waited for us," I said.

Vallance smiled with strained sheepishness. "I couldn't move," he confessed.

"It's too bad it hits you this way." I offered him my arm, which he gratefully took, while my nephew held him firmly by his other. "If we were only going to be out for a few days' run you would get over it. But as we're going to try and get back in a short while I imagine you will feel pretty rocky until we land."

"In a short while?" Vallance said, with obvious relief. "Why couldn't we go back now?"

"We can't go under our own power, and must wait either until the wireless set is fixed and we can send for a tug, or else pick up a tow from some vessel that comes in answer to our rockets."

We had reached Vallance's cabin and he sank, with a sigh, back upon his bed and closed his eyes. We left him there and went to my nephew's cabin, the door of which he locked as soon as we were inside. There was a set, intense look upon his face.

"I think we are getting warm," he said.

"The speck?"

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"Yes—with a 'perhaps' attached. I'm not banking on it too much, because everything so far has led us up against a blank wall; that wall being the hiding place of Micah Thrumm. There is no doubt but that he is on board. There is no doubt but that he intends to kill Mr. Billings. Who is with him now?"

"He is in my cabin. Alice is with him. I know that Captain Wickstrom has a particularly husky sailor stationed at the door—the one we saw as we passed—and two equally husky youngsters patrolling the deck outside the ports."

"Then we have time."

"Time?"

"For an investigation that I am going to make."

"I can help you, of course?" I said.

"No. It is something that I have to do alone."

"You can give me no hint?"

"For your own sake, no."

"Well, what shall I do?"

"The best thing you can do is to stay with Mr. Billings."

"Couldn't you give me one hint of the course you intend to pursue?" I urged.

"It would be better not."

"Simply for my own good?"

"For everybody's good."

There was no disbelieving his sincerity, nor his capability of dealing with the situation. His firm, young earnestness shone like a beacon light across the surface of my troubled sea. The weight of Micah Thrumm's letter pressing against my heart seemed lighter. I stood up, patted him on the shoulder, and unbolted the door.

"I have the fullest confidence in you," I said.

"I hope to God, sir, that it isn't misplaced."

The last glimpse I caught of him as I closed the door was of him sitting before his table and inspecting an envelope he had taken from one of its drawers. I recognized the envelope as the one that had contained the death threat sent to Billings by Micah Thrumm.

And it seemed to me that my nephew, as he stared intently at its surface, gave an abrupt start—as if some sudden knowl-

edge had just been brought home to him with the force of a stunning blow.

CHAPTER XIX.

A LIVID FOREHEAD.

FOR three full minutes, I was later informed, my nephew sat perfectly still and stared at the envelope from Micah Thrumm. And as each minute passed, what had at first been only the wildest of conjectures in his mind, became certainty.

Grim certainty.

Working with careful speed, he arranged his camera upon the table and took flash light photographs of his collection of finger-prints—the ones he had gathered since setting sail.

He developed his plates, dried them, and had excellent proofs within a space of twenty-five minutes. I am not familiar with the processes he used, but I know they were of the latest—also, judging from the bills that his apparatus cost me, the most expensive.

He arranged the entire collection, including the set given me by Commissioner Halsing, on the table and made a minute inspection with the aid of his magnifying glass. He found, at last, what he wanted. The solution of the mystery was his—with the exception of one puzzling feature—one feature that hovered just beyond his grasp.

He then went one step further.

He fastened, by means of clamps of his own devising, a microscope to the table top. He took from his pocket the envelope containing the clean sheet of paper in which he had wrapped the 'speck' he had wiped from the tip of the paper file in the wireless room. He lightly coated a glass slide with some adhesive stuff, folded, with an extremely steady hand, the sheet of paper once, and then tapped its all but imperceptible contents onto the glass slide. Having done so, he slipped the slide into its grooves and examined it through the strong microscopic lens.

He then realized that he was not alone.

Some one else was in the cabin with him. Behind him.

Some one who had crept like a shade

through the door which, after I had left him, he had been too engrossed in his sudden discovery to remember to bolt it again. Some one whom he sensed standing very near him—staring at him—staring at him with a peculiar malignancy and hate—some one whom he knew, as surely as he knew the sun would shine at dawning, was Micah Thrumm.

There had been no sound; no creak out of harmony with the gentle sighing noises of the vessel and the ever-restless sea; no sound of breathing or of feet slipping softly across the floor. And yet he knew that the man was there.

It was a wretched predicament to be in, and the slightest false move on his part would but hasten the swift rush—the swift plunge of a knife—instant death—

His head was bent low. His eye was close to the eyepiece of the microscope. His hands were resting lightly upon the top of the table. His legs were tucked well beneath it. It would take a full second for him to spring upright—to whirl around and grapple with the figure drifting creepingly toward his bowed back.

And a second was too long.

Whatever he did must be done in a flash; a flash so swift that the upraised hand of the assassin would find no time to strike. The man would expect him, if he did anything, to spring up—to hurl himself upon him. So he did the opposite. With a quick lunge, he threw his body sideways, fell flat on the floor, rolled under the table, and at once tugged at his gun until he got it out of his pocket. Then he looked from beneath the table—and saw nothing.

There was nothing there but the chair which he had overturned, and which now lay flat on its side. He called himself seven kinds of a fool, and decided that he was in for a fine spell of nerves. He had imagined the whole thing. There was no one there. There could be no one there, for from his position beneath the table he commanded a clear view of all the floor space of the cabin.

Then he heard a sound.

It was a gentle, almost imperceptible scraping, as of something moving on the table top above him.

"Oh," he said while a shock ran through him, "so there you are!"

"Yes," agreed a soft voice from above.

It was a very soft voice—a voice that was silky, and tenuous with inferred hisses.

"You're a pretty good jumper, aren't you," said my nephew.

"You're not such a bad diver yourself," said the voice.

"Of course you are Micah Thrumm?"

"Yes. I am Micah Thrumm."

"And I suppose you know," said my nephew, with as much bravado and confidence as he could muster, "that I've got you cornered. I happen to have a gun."

"So I saw. It's an ugly gun. I also have a gun—an ugly gun."

My nephew reflected. No bullet from a revolver would ever pierce that table.

"Will you give yourself up, or shall I have to call for the guards in the passage to come and get you? They'll shoot you dead if they do."

Micah Thrumm laughed quietly.

"There are no longer any guards in the passage," he said.

"That is a lie."

"No. You ought to know that it isn't. I never would have come here if the guards had been at their posts."

"Where are they?"

"They have gone to put out the fire."

"Fire?"

"Yes. A little fire. I started it."

"You haven't exactly been idle during the trip, have you!"

"No. I started the fire, by the way, in order to have a clear field and enough time to come in here and kill you."

"Try it."

"I shall. You are beginning to know too much. But you shan't see me before you die. You will never know who I am."

"You seem mighty certain it's I who am going to die."

"Oh, yes. There isn't any doubt in my mind about that at all. And you needn't think I don't realize your motive in chatting with me this way. You're trying to keep me interested until the guards get back to their posts. Silly fellow!"

"Not at all. I've always conceded that you were tremendously clever."

"Am, my dear boy—not were."

"That remains to be seen."

"Just so. Like my face, that remains to be seen."

Taking careful aim at a point on the opposite bulkhead just beneath the overhead, my nephew pulled the trigger of his gun. The bullet, he knew, would flatten itself harmlessly against the steel.

After the roar of the explosion had subsided, a thin chuckle came from above him.

"I wondered," said Micah Thrumm, "just when you would do that."

"You might just as well commence now on your prayers. They'll be busting in that door in one minute."

There was no answer.

"I said," repeated my nephew, "that they would be busting in that door in one minute."

Still there was no answer, nor was there any sound of anything astir in the passage. It was disconcerting—the sudden stillness after the first few minutes of hearing that answering voice. Perhaps every one was in the vicinity of the fire. Perhaps the sound of his shot had not been heard. He took indefinite aim and rapidly pulled the trigger three times. The corresponding sharp cracks filled the cabin with a vast tumult of sound. So it seemed to him. They must be heard. Some one—every one—would come at once.

But still there was silence. No—not quite—there was a scraping sound from the table top; a scraping sound and then the tips of four fingers creeping slowly beneath the edge at his feet. He held his breath and with his gun leveled toward the lower edge of the table, where in his excited folly he fondly expected the head of Micah Thrumm to appear, waited for his target.

There was still no sound. But the fingertips pressed tightly on the rim, as if to gain a purchase so that Micah Thrumm could lean over and peer below—in order to aim—to aim his own ugly gun—

The fingers belonged, my nephew decided, while his brain spun in nervous whirls, to a left hand. The forehead and eyes would therefore appear to their right. Trembling more than a little, he shifted his aim a fraction or so of an inch. Then, like some fan-

tastic substance found beneath the sea, there came into view a shock of ragged, gray hair.

With nervous fingers he centered the gun at the middle of the thatch of hair—waiting—scarcely breathing in his great nervousness—waiting for the first clear line of flesh. It came: a livid, pasty colored forehead. He fired. Once. Twice. He pulled the trigger a third time. There was no sound.

"Thanks," said the cool, peculiar voice of Micah Thrumm. "That, I believe, was your sixth shot. And now I shall kill you."

CHAPTER XX.

FIRELESS SMOKE.

IT is perfectly true that the first four shots fired by my nephew were never heard.

The fire started by Micah Thrumm was not a dangerous one, but we had no means for knowing so at the time of its discovery. The first indication we had that something was amiss was a burst of smoke that came sweeping suddenly aft from the bows. The alarm was given at once and spread on wings through the yacht. Everyone, sick or not, came rushing on deck and hurried forward, caught in the grip of that demoralizing fear which a fire at sea alone can arouse.

Captain Wicktrom was of no uncertain mind as to what to do. Regardless of what individual menace there might be to Billings, the yacht and her human freight as a whole were, in the final analysis, his greater responsibility. He recalled the sentries from their posts and had them take up their stations which had been assigned during the numerous fire drills he had conducted and the efficiency of which, until then, he had never had an opportunity for testing under actual conditions. There was naturally a great deal of confusion, but I believe that on the whole the excitement did not last longer than five minutes.

Though the volume of smoke was excessive, no immediate source of the fire could be discovered. For a moment it seemed that the deck itself was burning. But no flames could be seen. After the first burst of con-

fusion, smoke bombs were discovered and the whole business was recognized as its true worth, as a ruse on the part of Micah Thrumm.

If so, I felt, it had failed. For Billings, who had sufficiently recovered from the shock of his wound to move about again, had been constantly at my side throughout the alarm. He was quite unharmed. My first thought as a solution for the pseudo fire was that Micah Thrumm had been anxious to get us out of my cabin in order either to conceal himself within it, during our absence and the absence of the guards, or else to plant in it some instrument of death.

We had begun to straggle from the deck and into the saloon—every one chattering in more or less of a high-pitched, nervous fashion—when my nephew's fifth and sixth shots were heard.

For no sooner did he hear the voice of Micah Thrumm saying: "That, I believe, was your sixth shot. And now I shall kill you," than he realized in full what a fool he had been. Nor had there been any sane excuse for his folly.

Not once but a hundred times, since he had graduated from his primers, had he read of the ancient western trick of sticking an empty hat up to draw the enemy's fire. And in this case, as he well knew as soon as his brain cleared from the nervousness and excitement of the past tense moment, it had been nothing more human than Micah Thrumm had lowered beneath the edge of the table than an empty wig.

My nephew crouched at once to his knees in the least strained position he could affect, and tensed himself to plunge out and grapple Micah Thrumm's legs as soon as he should jump to the floor. And his eye looked ceaselessly along the table's lower rim in search of a hand that might appear and start pumping lead in his direction.

We had determined at that point the direction of the source of the two shots, and, still under the influence of mob excitement, had bunched into the passage and were frantically pounding upon my nephew's door.

It would not open, as Micah Thrumm had bolted it upon the inside, but it took

the huskiest of the sailors with us little enough time to put his shoulder against the panels with short, heavy lunges. They were not effective and Captain Wickstrom expedited matters by smashing his heavily shod foot against the woodwork. On the third smash the door gave and flung inwards. In our panicky nervousness we all of us crushed into the cabin after Captain Wickstrom. Micah Thrumm had turned out the lights as well as having bolted the door, and it took a second or two for some one to find the switch and press it.

The cabin was in indescribable confusion. The table had been overturned, and it seemed as if a whirlwind had picked up and misplaced everything movable. My nephew lay at length upon the floor, with an ugly welt rising on his forehead.

But Micah Thrumm had succeeded again in making good his escape, for outside of our immediate circle, the cabin held no stranger. In the confusion and few seconds of darkness before the switch had been pressed, he must have slipped through our milling bodies like an eel. But he could not have gotten very far, and I felt hot with rage at the injury done my nephew.

"After him!" I shouted, and seeing young Wyeth and Vallance, both of whom were flanking me, made an advance upon the door.

"Stop!" commanded Captain Wickstrom. "Chasings are finished. We haff done chasings enough."

"But he has just gone!" I insisted. "We are bound to catch him this time."

"Nefer!" said the captain. "He iss a deffil and can go into air like this! You men will go back to your posts. I will haff no more scamperings about this vessel. And you gentlemen, and Miss Alice," he said to the rest of us, "I suggest you go back to your cabins and stay on your guards."

"Your nephew," he turned to me, "iss already recovering from the blow on the head. You will haff no trouble in bringing him around. At any moment some ship may haff sighted our rockets and be bearing down upon us now. I shall transfer every one but the crew to her as soon as she

comes alongside. Then I know you will be safe."

What slight chance there had been of catching Micah Thrumm had evaporated, I felt, by then. "Whatever you think best," I said.

"Yess. Now I go to the bridge."

The cabin cleared with murmurs, curious glances, and not a little confusion. Alice, Billings, and I remained. I had managed to assist my nephew to the bed. He was partially recovered, although still considerably shaken and dazed.

Alice made a cold compress with a towel and applied it to the swelling on his forehead. His eyes opened widely and he looked from one to the other of us.

"Where are the rest?" he asked.

"Gone to their cabins," I told him.

"They were here, though, weren't they?"

"Yes."

"I thought I heard a jumble of voices just as I was coming to."

I could not see what difference it made, nor why he should have asked the question. He swung his feet over the side of the bed and sat up. He reviewed the litter of his effects.

"Damn," he said softly. "He's taken them with him."

The remark, as had been his previous ones, remained an enigma.

"Alice," he said, "take your father back to your cabin and keep him there."

"But you," said Alice, "you're hurt."

"Please do as I say. At once. You want to help him. You want to save his life. Then do as I tell you."

There was sufficient conviction in my nephew's voice to command obedience either with or against reason. They started for the door and I started to follow.

"Not you," he said to me.

I closed the door after Alice and Billings and turned toward my nephew.

"Now then," he said, "listen to me. You must do exactly as I tell you, and Micah Thrumm will be ours in half an hour."

"You know where he is?"

"No," he answered to my confusion. "But I know *who* he is—which is much more to the point."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



William Tries the Rough Stuff

By LOIS FINK HONBERGER

THE setting was perfect. Wide front porch, well back from the elm-shaded street—fairy flecks of moonlight penetrating the thick, secluding honeysuckle vine that filled the soft night air with fragrance—a low cushioned swing made for two—and the lady next door playing "Oh Promise Me" softly and with feeling. All the scene needed was the girl. And on the porch they waited for her—her father, a lover and his dog. Mr. Sprague, with the disillusioned patience of twenty-two years intimate knowledge of Suzanne and her ways; William Rouser Rigby—they never called him Bill—growing momentarily hotter under his immaculate collar as the long minutes grew into an hour; Sport, the bull terrier, with a wistful eye on the large isinglass covered candy box reposing in state on the correct creases of William's white trousered knees.

"I guess this shows me pretty well how I stand with Suzanne, Mr. Sprague," William

drummed on the candy box with nervous fingers. "I've had this date with her for over a week, and there's just no excuse—"

"Well, now, I wouldn't get discouraged if I was you. There's no telling what Sue's up to—"

"You said it!" remarked William feelingly.

"Mebbe she's just forgotten—"

"Huh! That's great consolation, that is! If I thought she'd gone and forgotten our date—"

"'Course, I don't know that that's it! Mr. Sprague put in hastily. "Mebbe Turkington's run out of gas."

"Say, they better not pull that one again! I found out that Turk had his old red junk heap filled up that afternoon just before they started. And you know they didn't burn up any fifteen gallons just going to the beach and back. Suzanne needn't think she's pulling the wool over my eyes. I'm not as green as I look. And I'm get-

ting pretty darn sick of it, Mr. Sprague. I've done every earthly thing she's wanted me to do this year. I've let her drive my new car all over creation. I've danced through five pairs of shoes, and played tennis at four thirty in the morning, and gone swimming at midnight, and shaved off my mustache—"

"I know you have, son. I know you have." Suzanne's father rose ponderously, moved his chair closer to William's disconsolate figure, and eased his huge body back into it with a gusty sigh. "And doggone it, William, I wouldn't be surprised if that was just where you made your mistake!"

"Shaving off my mustache?" William's well kept hand with its impressive diamond caressed his downy upper lip ruefully.

"Naw. Humoring her the way you do. Turnin' yourself inside out to please her. Turkington don't do it, you bet! Say—the line of talk that lad gives her! An' she just eats it up. Criticises her clothes. Tells her she can't sing worth a damn and he'd rather listen to the phonograph. Bawls her out if she keeps him waiting two minutes—say, lemme give you a pointer." Mr. Sprague paused to light a fresh cigar. "Last night he refused point blank to go to that club dance. Said it was too hot to dance, and dancin' was a stupid form of exercise anyway. And Sue stood for it! What's more, when he offered to take her into New York to a show she insisted she'd rather just go to a movie. And let me tell you, young feller, when a girl starts savin' a man's money for him—well, you better get right busy, or I'm afraid that lad's goin' to beat you to it!"

"Get busy!" groaned William. "What can I do, more than I'm doing? I've tagged her around morning, noon and night. Dad's growling his head off because I don't stick around the store more. You see, Mr. Sprague, I'm good enough to kill time with during the day, while that big stiff is wearing the greasy overalls, but evenings—Lately, I don't get a look-in. This is the first date I've had with Suzanne in five nights—"

"Well—" Mr. Sprague scratched his head thoughtfully. "Why don't you do like Turkington does—just show up whenever

you feel like it, date or no date? Or else come right out and ask her plump and plain—"

"Ask her! Say, I've asked her so often that when I meet her on the street I have to clap my hands over my mouth to keep from saying, 'Hello, Sue, will you marry me?' I can't exactly drag her off by the hair of the head."

Mr. Sprague chuckled. "Well, I dunno but what that'd be a prettty good idea. If I was in your place I'd try a little of the rough stuff, too. Copy this lad Turkington's style."

"Yes, and Suzanne would give me the gate so quick—"

"Wait a minute, now." Mr. Sprague inhaled deeply and sent a rich cloud of smoke through the honeysuckles. "You take my advice, young feller. I've raised seven girls, and I understand women some better'n you do. I'm telling you—and I know—that that's just where Turkington makes his big hit. Sort of a new experience for the kid—not havin' her own way. I guess we've kinda spoiled Sue—she bein' the baby, an' all—"

"I'll say you have!" snorted William.

"Atta-boy!" Mr. Sprague's mild blue eyes twinkled. "Now, why can't you talk up like that to Sue, 'stead of lettin' her twist you right around her little finger—"

"Oh, what chance have I got, anyway, against a guy that's been gassed and won medals and flies airplanes for a living? Even Mrs. Sprague rubs it in. Turkington's her little favorite, all right. You don't see her making any lemon pies for me. Or raving about my eyelashes, or inviting me over to eat waffles Sunday mornings." Frowning severely, William drew out his watch and consulted it.

"Of course, Turkington's just boardin'," soothed Suzanne's father. "He don't get home cooked victuals like you do—an' bein' an orphan—ma feels kinda sorry for him, I guess. Ma's awful tender-hearted."

The lady next door launched into another sentimental ballad.

"Well, I've waited long enough, Mr. Sprague," William pocketed his watch and rose with decision, drawing himself up to his full five feet nine. "I guess Suzanne

won't twist me around her little finger any more. Plenty of other nice girls in this town that 'll be glad to see me drive up in my new gas-wagon. And you can tell her for me. C'mon, sport. Suzanne's broken about the last date she 'll ever break with me!"

Standing there in the moonlight, clutching the large box of candy, William looked very grim, very tragic. He knew that he was impressive. There was not a slicker blond head in town than his. His tie was perfection. His regular profile alone would have got him into the movies—Suzanne had often told him so herself. Well, he'd show her.

"Now, look a-here, William." Mr. Sprague's tone was properly conciliatory. "Goin' away mad won't get you anywhere. I'm backin' you to win out—don't forget that! This guy Turkington's kinda forcing my hand, but you know there's no one I'd sooner see Sue tie to than you, come right down to it. You're both pretty young yet, but I married Suzanne's ma when she was about her age. An' it isn't as if you didn't have a good level head on your shoulders."

"Yes, and my prospects are sure." William sat down again in the squat wicker chair and gave each of his trouser legs a careful twitch. "It 'll be 'Rigby & Son' before long now. And, of course, some day, the whole store will be mine. Dad's tucked away a neat little pile, too. That's what I've been trying to tell Suzanne—but she won't listen—"

"Well, Sue's kinda romantic," her fond father explained. "Don't ever give that side of it a thought. Mother's that way, too. That's where Sue gets it. You know, women are funny. Impractical—all of 'em. But you can get 'em to do most anything if you just know how to go about it. Now you take Sue's mother. You'd never believe it, but I had just such a time with her as you're having with Sue. An' if I'd taken no for an answer—" He chuckled reminiscently. "Twice I was engaged to Susan, and twice I was—dis-engaged. Carried that marriage license around in my vest pocket till it was pretty near wore in two, waitin' for her to say the word. Finally made up my mind I'd waited about long enough. And I drove up with my two bays one eve-

nin'—'twas just such an evenin' as this—full moon, and the honeysuckles bloomin—Susan, she thought we was goin' to a sociable, but I thought different. Got her into the buggy, and I says, 'Susan,' says I, 'tonight's our weddin' night. Do' know as you think so now, but we're goin' to travel right smart until you do.' And I started those bays up, and kept 'em goin' like greased lightnin', and time we'd covered about twelve mile Susan reckoned she was ready to look up a minister.

"Now, d'ye get my point, son? You gotta just take things into your own hands. You gotta kinda make 'em sit up an' take notice. Suzanne's impetuous an' headstrong—takes after her mother in that. But she likes you. It was always William this and William that, up to a couple a weeks ago. I think Turk kinda got around Suzanne—and mother, too—takin' 'em for that airplane ride. Woman ma's age should know better than to go gallivantin' up in the sky—"

"You ought to forbid it, Mr. Sprague. You ought positively to forbid both of them. It's not safe."

"Well, you follow the old man's advice, now." Mr. Sprague changed the subject hastily. "Stick tight. And try talkin' right up to Sue. Treat her rough. Turkington's going away in a few days. Be gone about a week. Gonna pilot a new airplane down South somewheres. So now's your chance. You'll have Sue all to yourself."

"Gee gosh! I was going on a camping trip with one of the fellows. We've got our outfits all ready. New fishing tackle, and army tents— But if that big piece of cheese isn't going to be hanging around I guess I'll stick, like you said."

"That's the idea! You tie to the old man, and we'll have ma digging my dress-suit out of the moth balls for the weddin' before she knows it!" chuckled Mr. Sprague. "Goin' to throw it away soon's Suzanne's married. No more use for it then. Been togged up in it for four weddin's. Hate dress-suits an' weddin's. And ma just dotes on 'em. Almost broke her heart because Geraldine and Alice eloped and cheated her out of all the fuss an' feathers. Yes, young fellow, you better

not go campin' just yet. Better stick around. Goin' to fish, was you?"

"Sure thing. Lots of fish out in the old South Bay now."

"Haven't been fishin' this year," sighed Mr. Sprague. "Ma's so afraid I'll exert myself, with my weak heart—"

The quiet of the street was shattered by a rakish red roadster that teetered perilously round the corner and shivered to a standstill with a shrill shriek of brakes.

"Sufferin' saints!" exploded Mr. Sprague.

"The way that fool drives!"

"It's Suzanne, driving!" William corrected crisply. "Honestly, Mr. Sprague, you ought to talk to her about the way she drives. She 'll get killed some day!"

Suzanne sprang lightly out of the driver's seat. "Four thirty, north court," came her clear young voice. Followed a low bass rumble. William leaned forward, straining both eyes and ears.

"All right, make it six then, but that will only give us an hour to play," said Suzanne distinctly.

"You see!" snorted Mr. Sprague.

William saw. Turkington's bright mop of red hair had plainly never known slickem. Obviously, he had not read "What the Young Man Is Wearing." Hatless, coatless, sleeves rolled up and the collar of his soft shirt turned in so that a wide tanned V of throat and chest was exposed, Turkington sat in that old red junkheap of a car as if he were sitting on the world—sat and chinned with Suzanne. Both were apparently oblivious of their disapproving audience on the porch.

"Well, of all the nerve—" growled William.

"You light into the kid good an' hard!" Mr. Sprague admonished him.

Finally Turkington slid over to the driver's seat. "So long!" he called, and the battered red car moved away with scarcely a sound.

Suzanne stood and watched it out of sight around the corner, to William's intense disgust. Then she came swiftly up the front steps, poised there as gracefully as a young swan, and peered into the shadows in mock concern. And standing there, her big brown eyes dancing with mischief,

her short dark hair a mass of windblown curls framing a piquant, pointed little face, she was enough to make any man's heart beat faster.

"Well, look who's here!" she trilled. A fresh outburst of song from the lady next door was her only answer. "William—aren't I just the limit! Keeping you waiting like this. I'm sorry. We went over to the flying field, and Turkey took me all through the plant—showed me just how the planes are made. And it took ages longer than we expected. We went up into—I think they call it the air chamber—and watched a darling little new model fly around, just exactly as if some one was driving it."

A long, pregnant silence. "Oh, don't be cross!" Suzanne took the last two steps at a bound. "Say something, somebody! Dad, is this the proper way to greet the prodigal daughter?" She laid her smooth cheek against his, coaxingly. "Solemnity doesn't in the least become you. Please smile for me, dad. That's better!" And she pouted her pretty lips and kissed him. "William, you're forgetting point seventeen in the book of etiquette. Gentlemen should always rise to greet the lady. Oh—cheer up, Will-yum! Nobody's dead."

"Not yet!" agreed William darkly.

Mr. Sprague growled: "Had your supper, young lady?"

"Sure." Suzanne selected a fat cushion from the swing and settled her slim, cream flannel clad self on the top step with her back against a pillar. Sport came over and thrust his head into her lap. "Two hamburger and onion sandwiches, hot from the lunch wagon. Dill pickles. Coffee—"

"Huh!" snorted William. "Fine kind of grub to feed a jane!"

"This jane loved it," Suzanne declared.

"Well, you better go inside and tell Katie," Suzanne's father put in. "She's been keeping stuff hot for you for hours."

"Good old Katie! Oh — Will-yum! Chocolates!" Suzanne reached out a slender tanned hand and took the box from his reluctant grasp. "And I don't deserve 'em. Don't deserve 'em at all. You ought to give them to Helen Frey—or some other nice girl."

"I ought," agreed William crisply. "And next time I will."

Suzanne's eyebrows went up the merest trifle.

"Is that a promise?" she inquired sweetly. And selecting a large chocolate she took a dainty bite and fed the rest to Sport.

"Don't give that dog candy!"

"M-mmmm, good!" murmured Suzanne.

"Just think what Helen is missing. Poor Sport! He does so want another nice soft jelly center. And his cruel master says no. Just this one, Will-yum?"

"If you were half as kind to me as you are to my dog—"

"Love my dog—love me!" Suzanne giggled. "Here's a jelly center for you, too—just like Sport's. No? Don't you want it? Dad, you'll have some, I know. Come on, Will-yum. Just one. They're delicious. Just to show that I'm forgiven." Her laughing face was very near his own. Her brown eyes danced with mischief, and a bewitching little dimple came and went in her cheek. What could a fellow say to a girl like that? William took a chocolate, although he knew he oughtn't. Mr. Sprague coughed meaningly, but he coughed too late.

"Get some down your Sunday throat, dad?" inquired Suzanne innocently. "Scuse me for a minute, folks, while I make my peace with Katie." And Suzanne and the chocolates vanished within the house.

"Seems to me you're kinda slippin' a little," remarked Mr. Sprague mildly.

"Well, you just wait!" William promised. "I didn't want to make it too strong, just at first, for fear she might suspect something."

"Oh, take more, Katie. Take a whole handful," came Suzanne's blithe voice. "William brought them. Wasn't it sweet of him? And I'm so sorry I missed the chicken pie. You see—" the sweet voice dropped to a confidential murmur.

"That girl!" sighed Mr. Sprague. "The way she gets around people! For the land's sake, boy, don't let her wrap you around her—"

"What are you two whispering about?" demanded Suzanne, settling herself at her father's feet again.

"Things no woman should know." Mr. Sprague winked at William. "Well, I guess I'll toddle down street and see what Sim's doing." He rose heavily.

"Dad—you'll do nothing of the sort! You were up till twelve thirty last night, and it isn't going to do your weak heart any good to play poker half the night again to-night. If you're going to toddle anywhere you just toddle off to bed, or I'll wire mother to come straight home and take care of you."

"Weak heart—bunk!" growled Mr. Sprague. "You'd think I had one foot in the grave, way you women folks talk."

"You would have, if we didn't watch you. You toddle along now and get your beauty sleep."

"Ho—ho—hum!" yawned Mr. Sprague obediently. "Reckon it is about time for an old duffer like me to be hitting the hay, G'night."

"Poor dad!" Suzanne chose another chocolate. "He does love to play poker. Have to keep an eagle eye on him whenever mother's away."

William maintained a dignified silence. Suzanne regarded him thoughtfully for a long moment. Then: "Will-yum," she declared, "if you're going to keep on making a noise like an oyster I'm going to find some one else to talk to, 'cause I've just got to talk to some one this be-aautiful night."

"Meaning your air-route chauffeur?"

"William, you are so discerning! Now that dad's gone, I'll tell you a deep, dark secret. Turkey took me for another hop! And—oh, thrills—we looped the loop, and went into a nose dive—William, you've no idea how thrilling it is to be standing on your head about eighteen million feet above the clouds—"

"Suzanne Sprague! You need a guardian. Between driving that rattly red tin tomato can at the rate of fifty-five miles an hour, and—"

"Thanks, old dear. Think you're qualified for the job? If I slowed down for every little old bump the way you do—Say, let's go for a spin. No fun sitting here like two stuffed owls on a log. I'll drive—"

"No—thing doing!" declared William emphatically.

"Oh, of course, if you're afraid I'll hurt your old car—"

"*Mine* isn't an old car. Remember that. And I'm not afraid of your hurting it, because you're not going to drive it again until you get sense."

"Why—why William Rouser Rigby! What a nasty remark! Was I the one who bent that left front fender—answer me that. Have I ever as much as scratched your precious car?"

"Some fools," declared William, "have luck!" He lighted a cigarette with a hand that was not quite steady in the tense silence that followed.

"Well — the — nerve — of — some — people!" Suzanne reached for his case, extracted his cigarette expertly just as he was taking his second long, heartening puff, and used it for a lighter. The old man's advice was simply jake! Why, she was taking it like a lamb!

"What's the matter with you to-night?" She regarded him almost anxiously, straight brows drawn together in a puzzled frown. "Are you getting nervous, or did you merely bounce out of the wrong side of the bed this morning?"

"Suzanne—" William retrieved his cigarette. "I went to talk to you—seriously."

"William—you're so nice—until you get serious!"

"Oh, you can't put me off this time! I'm going to talk seriously, and you're going to listen — for once in your young life!"

"William, if you get serious—I'll scream!"

"Of course," William ignored the levity, "I know that the furniture business isn't—romantic. It doesn't stack up very well with riding through pink clouds for a living—"

"Who ever said it wasn't romantic?" Suzanne tossed her cigarette away with a dramatic gesture. "Why—I think it's just the romantic-est—Will-yum! Think! Selling cunnin' twin beds, and—and baby carriages—"

"Listen to me, Suzanne!" William moved closer and fixed her with a steely gaze. "I'm

in dead earnest now. *When are you going to marry me?*"

"What a thrilling proposal!" giggled Suzanne. "The thirty-ninth, isn't it?" Then her face sobered. "Oh, that wasn't kind! William, you're an old peach, and we've had such heaps of good times together. Why will you spoil it—this way? Why can't we just keep on being—good friends?"

"Do you talk this way to that red-headed mechanic when he makes love to you?"

"One more remark like that, William Rigby, and I'll go straight in the house!"

"Oh, no, you won't! You'll sit right here and listen to me!" And William's hand closed firmly round one of her slim wrists. A gasp, a wrench, a flying leap that sent what remained of the chocolates rolling down the steps, and the front door closed behind Suzanne with a bang. William stared blankly into space. Sport retrieved the chocolates one by one, unrebuked, unnoticed even. Then he came and poked a cold nose into his master's listless hand.

"*Just a lit-tle lo-o-ve, a lit-tle ki-iss,*" sang the lady next door in a rich, syrupy contralto. William rose, stumbled over the lid of the candy box, and sent it half way across the lawn with one vicious kick.

"Rough stuff—hell!" he muttered.

II.

BUT he was back again, next evening. He drove up boldly, fortified by a fetching new tie, his week's salary, and the gratifying knowledge that he looked, and was, a thoroughly eligible young man. Suzanne, in a new and becoming orchid organdie, was occupying the porch swing.

"Oh, it's *you*!" she remarked. Her emphasis was not promising.

"Same old faithful. What about a spin?" It was thus nonchalantly that William bridged the gap.

Suzanne's straight brows went up the merest trifle. "Of course you've come to see dad, because I don't remember your asking to come to see me. He's gone down to the post office. If you walk down Maple Street you'll be sure to find him."

"Nifty looking rag you've got on, Suzanne." Ignoring her sarcasm, William sat down boldly in the big wicker chair.

"Like it?" Suzanne thawed a little. "Isn't so bad, is it, considering that I created it all by myself?"

"Made it?" William was properly impressed. "Gee gosh! Stand up and let me see. Say, it's the snake's whiskers, all right, all right! Want to give it the air at the South Bay Club to-night?"

Suzanne stifled a yawn daintily. "Too hot. It is stupid exercise anyway—dancing."

"Let's ride then. Aw—come on, Sue!"

Suzanne's brown eyes danced with mischief. "Fifteen miles an hour?"

"Fifty, if you say so! The chariot waits."

"Yes—for a long time, if it waits for me. Because I'm going out in that junky little old red tomato can this evening—if you get me."

"Well, of course, if you feel that way about it—I guess Helen Frey won't hesitate long when I ask her. I guess maybe she won't just jump at the chance of a dance, and a run over to the Outside Inn afterward—"

"Won't she—just!" agreed Suzanne. "Give her my love, and tell her I hope she enjoys playing second fiddle."

William took his departure in dignified silence. He was half way to the gate when the red tomato can rounded the corner, and propelled by its owner's masterful hand, came to an abrupt standstill a perilous two inches from the rear bumper of the shining new sedan.

"Hey—look out, there! You crazy!" howled William. Then he heard Suzanne's delighted giggle close behind him, and wheeled sharply. "Yes, here's your greasy mechanic friend now. All dressed up, too. Bet he's going to blow you to a nickel ice cream sandwich!"

"You better say it low!" Suzanne's eyes flashed fire.

Turkington disengaged his long body from the shabby red roadster and came toward them, grinning broadly. He wore white flannels to-night. Yes, and he had a collar on, for once. And a wide striped

tie—holy mackerel, what a tie! William's soul sickened with envy.

"Just leaving, William?" Turk inquired pleasantly.

"How did you guess it?" queried William with heavy sarcasm.

"Don't rush away on my account."

William, unable to think of a sufficiently scathing reply, retreated to the sedan in silence. Under his hasty manipulation it separated itself from the red tomato can by a distance of three feet, hiccuped twice, and stopped. William tried again. The starter gave forth a maddening crescendo snarl, but that was all.

Turkington called, "What's wrong? Flooded her?"

"Nothing wrong. I'm just sticking around because I like the scenery." Out of the tail of his eye William saw Suzanne's amused smile. He drew another long, hoarse wail of protest from the starter.

"Say, fellow, for the love of Pete, lay off! That won't do any good. Let's have a look." Turkington was raising the hood. "Yes, you've flooded her for fair. Just slide over, will you, and let me whisper persuasively to that engine?"

"Don't bother." Silently cursing his luck, William climbed out of the car.

"Where are your tools?" questioned Turkington good naturedly.

"Under the front seat, I suppose. I've never used them."

"Want me to telephone the garage to send a man down, William?" Suzanne inquired pointedly.

"Of course not!" Turk interposed. "Suzanne, how do you get that way? I'll have her humming in two shakes."

"Don't trouble yourself." William's tone was icy. "I'll get Hawkins down to fix it."

"No trouble at all." Turkington was peeling off his coat now. "Carburetor just wants a little coaxing."

"The show," announced Suzanne, "starts in twenty minutes, Turk!"

Turkington folded his coat neatly and laid it on the grass. "I can fix it in fifteen," he grinned, and set to work. Suzanne regarded his broad back thoughtfully, then turned and went back to the house. Wil-

liam stood helplessly by while his rival did mysterious things with a wrench.

Mr. Sprague rounded the corner, the evening newspaper under his arm, and stopped. "What's the trouble?" he puffed.

"Engine's gone crazy," William explained vaguely.

"Evening, Mr. Sprague." Turkington raised a perspiring countenance. "Just a little water in the carburetor, that's all. Guess William must have been buying cheap gasoline."

"No such thing!" declared William indignantly. "Don't have to." Then he caught sight of Suzanne coming airily down the path, her white beaded bag in her hand, and over one arm a shimmering wrap edged with white fur.

"I called the garage and they're going to send Hawkins down as soon as he gets back from another call," she announced.

Turkington straightened up, brushed a sandy lock from his forehead with a smeary hand, and stared. "For the love of Pete, Suzanne, what'd you do that for? I told you not to!"

"Because. It's nearly time for the show, and—why Tom Turkington! Look at your nice white trousers! Both knees! And you've got a smear across your forehead—Go straight in and wash up. Hurry!"

"Woman," said Turk in his pleasant, lazy drawl, "can't you see I'm busy? You trot right in now and call up that garage, and tell 'em the job's finished, see? And, say—fish my handkerchief out of this back pocket for me, will you, Sue?"

"Here's your old handkerchief. Now come on. William's in no hurry. He can wait until Hawkins arrives on the scene."

Turkington dabbed at his forehead, widening the area of the smudge, and bent over the engine again.

"Come on, Turk!" Suzanne's voice was pleading.

"For cat's sake, Suzanne, have a little patience! I'll have this boat running in five minutes now." Suzanne, with a resigned little sigh, turned toward the house again.

"You see!" said Mr. Sprague succinctly in William's ear. William caught up with Suzanne just as she was ascending the steps.

"Still jumping through the hoops, I see," he murmured.

"What do you mean—hoops?" Suzanne sat down in the swing and eyed him coldly.

"I guess you know, all right. I guess everybody knows. The whole town's talking about it—the way you're letting that big stiff boss you around!"

"Really?" Suzanne's voice was dangerously sweet.

"You said it! Why, Turk's even bragged, himself, to a certain Jane about how he can just wrap you right around his little finger!"

"He did no such thing!"

"Did so!" lied William brazenly. "I guess this won't make a nice, juicy morsel for the village gossips, too—time Miss Hayes spreads it! She's been sitting there on her porch taking it all in—the way you obey the master's voice!"

"Anything else?" The toe of a slim white kid slipper tapped the floor impatiently.

"Yes. Speaking of the slave period—how does it feel to sit around half the evening and wait for a guy?"

At that exact instant William's car came to life. "Told you I'd have her going in five minutes!" Turk sang out. He throttled the engine down to a soft, even purr and came toward them, rubbing his hands with a piece of waste. In his wake shambled Mr. Sprague.

"Thanks a lot," murmured William unenthusiastically.

"Don't mention it, old kid. Now, Suzanne, I'll get washed up—"

"Dad," said Suzanne sweetly, "will you telephone the garage and tell them that we found a mechanic? I haven't time. And remember, you promised to go to bed early. William and I are going to trip the light fantastic at the Outside Inn."

Turk's good natured grin faded, but he merely shrugged.

"You said it!" burred William, scarcely believing his ears. "Some jazz band, down there! Well, so long, Mr. Sprague. S'long, Turk. Thanks awfully for fixing the car for us."

Turk watched them drive away in gloomy silence. Then, "Like to see a good show,

“sir?” he inquired of Mr. Sprague. “I’ve got two tickets.”

“Kind of late, isn’t it?” parried Suzanne’s father.

“No. Bet I can get us down there yet in time to see the start of the piece!”

“Not on your life, young fellow!” growled Mr. Sprague. “Not the way you drive. I got a weak heart.”

III.

IN spite of his temporary victory, the next few days were anxious ones for William. True, he saw rather more of Suzanne. Turkington, since the night of his summary dismissal, had not put in another appearance. William tried earnestly to follow Mr. Sprague’s expert advice, but it is difficult to be stern and domineering with a girl who giggles at one’s carefully rehearsed declarations. Then came the cruel bolt from the blue.

Suzanne decided, overnight, to visit a friend at Sayville. And it was Turkington—suddenly returned to favor, how and when William could only gloomily conjecture—who drove her over in the tomato can, the evening before he started on his Southern flight. William had a lengthy interview with Mr. Sprague that evening.

When he turned up a week later—uninvited and unannounced—to drive Suzanne home from Sayville, she appeared only mildly surprised. It was a brilliant, golden afternoon—an afternoon made for lovers. William was keyed up to such a pitch that he let the car out daringly, between towns, to as much as forty miles. He hoped Suzanne noticed.

But she made none of her usual teasing comments about the way he drove. She was unusually quiet, too. Sitting there beside him in her crisp, pale green linen frock and wide white hat, she seemed as remote and unattainable as one of the fleecy clouds overhead. William stole frequent, furtive glances at her.

“Want a nut fudge sundae?” he inquired once, ending a long silence.

Suzanne shook her head. “No thanks, old dear.” Assuredly, there was something wrong with Suzanne! He stopped and pur-

chased her favorite brand of cigarettes. These, too, she declined gently—all too gently. And she hadn’t even suggested driving the car. Could she possibly suspect?

But when he swerved off the main road she only inquired mildly:

“What’s the big idea? This is nothing but a lane.”

“Got to see a man,” he told her glibly.

They passed an old farmhouse and continued on down the lane, which ended abruptly in a strip of sandy beach. Beyond lay the sparkling blue waters of the Great South Bay. Lazy waves lapped gently against a tiny pier. William drew a long sigh of relief when he heard the sudden hum of the trim mahogany speedboat beyond it.

“Now, hop out,” he commanded curtly.

Suzanne stared. “What for?”

“Never mind what for. You do as I tell you, see?”

“Why, Will-yum, old dear, what’s come over you?”

“You heard me, Suzanne!” thundered William in true villain style. “Step down.” He sprang out and possessed himself of her absurdly small patent leather suit case.

“Oh, you masterful man!” purred Suzanne, and removing her floppy straw hat she tossed it into the rear seat. Then things began to happen. Two tall, black-masked giants appeared from nowhere. Suzanne gave a shrill little scream as the taller one lifted her none too gently and carried her, kicking and struggling, to the boat. William mumbled something to the other, who promptly jumped into the car and drove away. Suzanne stopped fighting and stared hard, her eyes growing rounder and rounder. Then she giggled. The giant promptly bound her eyes with a blue bandanna.

“What is this—blind man’s bluff?” she inquired. The giant’s mouth spread in a broad grin as he wound the rope deftly around her slender ankles. William, climbing gingerly into the boat with the suit case, gave him a black look.

“Her hands—you fool!” he hissed. “Bind her hands.”

“If you would kidnap me,” shrilled Suzanne indignantly, “why didn’t you wait

till dark? This daylight stuff is awfully tame." The giant snickered.

"William, you're some picker!" he announced admiringly.

A little smile twitched at the corners of Suzanne's red mouth. "I can tell," she said, "that you are a man of discernment. Too bad that my father is going to have to send you to jail!"

"Tune her up," directed William. The giant removed his mask, revealing a mild and youthful countenance, winked at William, then gave his entire attention to the boat, and under his practiced hand it made a quick, graceful half circle and headed up the Bay, sending forth shining shafts of silver spray as it gathered speed. They crossed in fifteen minutes of swift motion to Saltaire, giving all other craft a wide berth, then headed for the inlet.

Suzanne, sitting straight and tense, made no further comment until William freed her hands. Then she tore off the bandage, gave the stranger—who had resumed his impressive black mask—a long, curious stare, surveyed the lonely stretch of beach ahead with its twin pyramid tents rising like huge toadstools out of the sand, and smiled her lazy, tantalizing smile.

"Never thought you had it in you, Will-yum," she murmured.

The boat headed inshore swiftly, slackened speed, stopped. Sport barked a noisy greeting from the beach.

"All right. You can go ashore now." William picked up the shiny suit case from the bottom of the boat.

"Thanks. And if I refuse?"

"Pick her up, Bud!"

Suzanne made a flying leap that landed her clear of the wet sand, and Sport flung himself upon her with loud yelps of joy. William held brief converse with the giant and came ashore, and the speedboat roared away in a cloud of spray.

There was a long, electric silence. "Now, what's the big idea?" Suzanne seated herself on a log and waited expectantly.

William cleared his throat. "The idea is just this. You'll never listen to me at home. So I picked out a spot where there's no distraction, and no competition."

"Sheik of the desert," breathed Suzanne,

"are we going to stay here—just we two—forever and ever?"

William opened the flap of the nearest tent and put her bag inside. "That's your tent," he announced briefly.

"In the movies," said Suzanne, "they never do it that way. There's always just one tent, and the hero lies out under the stars."

William sat down beside her on the log. "You think you're a great little kiddie, don't you?"

"You're no novice at it yourself, old dear. Now just what time to-night do you plan to get me home? I wrote dad that I'd positively be there in time for supper, and he'll be worried—knowing that I'm with you."

"No he won't. You see, I wired him from Sayville—just before I picked you up this afternoon—that you'd decided to stay another week."

"You—*signed my name?*"

William lighted a cigarette nonchalantly.

"Sure. All's fair in love and—"

"That's forgery!" Suzanne sprang to her feet, her eyes black with anger. "Downright forgery! Maybe you think all this is funny, William Rigby. I don't. It's gone far enough, now. You take me home—right straight away—or you'll regret it to the last day you live!"

"Always glad to accommodate," drawled William, "but the swimming's not good. Current's frightfully swift here."

Suzanne gave him an annihilating look, turned and started down the beach.

"Better stick close to camp," called William. "Lots of snakes around."

But she walked on gamely for perhaps a dozen yards. Later, she stalked past him without so much as a glance in his direction, her proud little head held high, and went into her tent and closed the flap. William sighed, rose, and began rustling wood for the supper fire.

Suzanne came when he called her, and sitting cross-legged on the sand, ate with apparent relish. William had done himself proud. The flounder was browned to a turn. The baked potatoes had a delicious smoky flavor.

"According to the movies," commented

Suzanne, helping herself to another piece of fish, "I should refuse to touch a morsel."

"In the movies," William reminded her, "the beautiful girl always marries the villain who stole her away."

Suzanne giggled, and his spirits soared. "Have a fag?" he ventured, tossing the pack into her lap. Suzanne selected a cigarette, and accepted his offer of a lighted stick.

"When you're in jail," she told him, "you'll miss your smokes like anything!"

"When we're married," persisted William, "we'll make my dad build us a house with a nice little smoking room—"

"These mosquitoes," Suzanne put in rudely, "are fierce!"

"Come over closer to the fire and they won't bother you."

The flaming red ball of the sun sank lower and lower over the smooth, shining waters of the bay. William gave Sport the remnants of their feast. Suzanne looked on with languid interest while he scoured the cooking utensils with wet sand, washed and dried them carefully, and stowed them away in the second tent. Then he heaped more wood on the fire and stretched out near her. Sport came and curled himself into a tight white ball between them.

"One large evening!" remarked William enthusiastically.

Suzanne, ignoring him, traced her initials in the sand, followed them by a second set, and drew a heart around them. The second set were not William's. The silence had lasted for a long time when Suzanne screamed.

"Ugh! A horrid toad!" She scrambled to her feet. "It jumped right up on my hand!"

"I was just going to make myself scarce," growled William, "but I guess I better stick around—since a poor harmless little hoptoad sends you into hysterics."

Suzanne shivered. "Don't let me keep you," she told him valiantly.

"You cold?"

"Freezing! Not that it matters to you, of course—"

William disappeared and came back with a heavy brown-sweater. Suzanne shrugged her thin shoulders into it, examined the

ground suspiciously, and sat down again close to the fire.

"You know I'm just absolutely nuts about you, Suzanne!"

"You have such nice ways of showing it! Think I'm going to sleep in that tent—and let those horrid things hop all over me? I'll sit here all night first!"

"Don't have to sleep in a tent." William moved closer. "Just say the word, Suzanne, and you can sleep in your own little bed to-night. Just give me your solemn word of honor that you'll go with me tomorrow morning to get the license—"

"Oh! As you said, the swimming isn't all that it might be."

"Well—there's a way of overcoming that."

"I thought so! Suppose you get us out of this creepy place before it gets absolutely pitch dark."

"Mean it, Suzanne? No kidding? Gee gosh! I'll be so good to you—"

"Why, you conceited wretch! Have I ever even implied that I'd marry you? Look me in the eye now, William! Have I ever tied any strings to you? Haven't I said no, and no, and no—"

"But now you're going to say yes! A—w, Suzanne! I'll be so good to you—"

"I know you would, old dear. You'd never stay out nights, or gamble, or sell the baby's shoes for drink, or even look at any other girl—not even Helen. And you'd always remember to kiss me good-by as if you meant it—not just a duty peck. And you'd come home for lunch every day—"

"You said it!" William moved still closer.

Sport cocked a nervous ear and growled ferociously. Suzanne turned and surveyed the long sea grasses behind her—tall waving plumes in the dim half-light.

"I hope there isn't another horrid top-toad—"

"No, he's just barking at the sea-gulls. Go on—"

"Where did I leave off?"

"I'd come home every day for lunch," murmured William soulfully.

"Yes, and strew the paper all over the floor Sunday mornings. And we'd drive—fifteen miles an hour—every nice Sunday

afternoon. And how deadly dull and monotonous and awful it would be!"

"Aw, Suzanne! Why can't you be serious for a minute. Dad will build us a big house—"

"Don't want a big house."

"Well, what do you want?"

Suzanne gazed pensively at the ragged half moon. "I want a little cabin—on a white, sandy beach with no hoptoads. A cabin mostly all fireplace—you know, the huge, rough stone kind. Big jars of golden-rod and asters on the mantel. And bright blue furniture. And a pretty blue boat to match—fat blue cushions—and, yes, a tiny tinkly phonograph. And a perfectly marvelous cook to cook just nothing but fried chicken and cherry pie and watermelon pickles—"

"Yes, go on," breathed William.

"And two be-eautiful sets of twins—"

An alien sound—sonorous, lingering, interrupted her reverie.

"What's that?" squealed Suzanne.

"That? Oh—that's nothing. Just one of those queer, unaccountable night noises you always hear out in the big, open—"

"Night noises is right! I've been hearing 'em ever since I can remember. I'd know that musical snore anywhere. *Dad—where are you? Dad, you miserable old sinner, wake up!* Come and join the happy family!"

A grunt, a low mumble, and Mr. Sprague, despite William's frantic signals, sham-bled, groaning and stretching, into the firelight.

"Young feller!" he roared, "Why did you tell me there was no mosquitoes on this beach? Millions of 'em! Millions! I'm well nigh eaten alive! You signal that speed-boat, an' be damn quick about it! Won't be your fault if I don't die of malaria—er else rheumatism—lyin' on that cold, damp sand—thought you'd 'a' had a floor in your tent—"

"Serves you right, dad!" giggled Suzanne. "Oh, you needn't try to look innocent! I knew you had a hand in this!"

"That's it! Blame everything on your poor old dad! Drag me 'way out here for

weakfish, an' all I get is a couple a' measly flounders—an' not even a taste of them! Me—eatin' cold corn beef sandwiches, while you eat up all my fish! Couldn't even smoke my pipe—pretty near dead of thirst—"

Suzanne's shoulders began to shake. "Oh—you two!" she gasped. "If you're not just too funny for words! Isn't often that a girl begins her honeymoon by getting kidnaped by—"

"Honeymoon?" burred William hopefully.

"Honeymoon!" growled Mr. Sprague.

"You see, dad," Suzanne caroled, "Turk was a little afraid of William and his—taking ways. So he married me the evening he took me to Sayville—just to be on the safe side!"

"Aw—go on—Suzanne! We're not as gullible as we look!"

Suzanne drew out a slender chain and held it up to the firelight. "Wedding ring—engagement ring—" she told them off dramatically. There was an ominous silence. "And the certificate," she added shamelessly, "is in my stocking. If William will just turn his head—"

"Gee-ee gosh!" groaned William. "I don't want to be shown anything more! Gee—gosh! Mr. Sprague, you're certainly one fine fixer, you are! Putting me up to abducting a married woman—"

"Sufferin' saints!" gulped Mr. Sprague. "How in time was I to know that this nervy little minx would—"

"Oh, but you're the wise guy that knows all about women!"

"Young feller, take it from me—I don't know nothin' about women! You don't know nothin' about women. Don't nobody know nothin' about 'em, no time, no-how!"

"You said it!" declared William ruefully. "Well, this finishes me! Never again! I'm off 'em for life! From now on I'm the hard boiled, steel-hearted woman-hater!"

"Yes, Will-yum," giggled Suzanne, "from now on—until—about day after tomorrow!"

And William was too busy signaling the speedboat to contradict her.

THE END



The Valley of the Stars*

By **CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER**

Author of "*Channing Comes Through*," "*The Way of the Buffalo*," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PREVIOUS PARTS

EDNA PENDLETON goes West to claim a partnership in a ranch willed to her. Hale Seaton, a young attorney, accompanies her. Ross, a tall, handsome but saturnine cowman, guides them on the eighty-mile ride to the Circle Dot. The travelers find Nellie Porter, fourteen, cowering in the brush. Her parents have been slain by Indians, who in turn were killed by Fagin and Brandt Adams, gunmen. At the Circle Dot it is revealed that Ross is Nevins, part owner of the ranch. Grace Rignal, ward of Nevins, falls in love with Seaton. Some one unidentified tries to murder Seaton by hanging; the Easterner is cut down just in time. Nevins rides to Hamlin's ranch and finds him stabbed to death. Fagin and Adams discover that the knife used is Nevins's. Nevins kills a sheriff's deputy sent to arrest him, and flees. Fagin and Adams appear at the Circle Dot with legal papers giving Fagin possession of the property; Nellie Porter is made Adams's ward.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ORGANIZED LAWLESSNESS.

SHORTLY after midnight of the first day of Fagin's brutal assumption of authority at the Circle Dot, Edna softly opened the door of her room and gazed down the narrow hall, which was

faintly illuminated by a bracket lamp at the far end.

She stood in the partly opened door for some minutes, listening, hearing nothing.

Fagin had carried out his expressed determination to occupy Nevins's room. Both Grace and Edna had gone upstairs early to avoid Fagin, and both were occupying

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the room that Grace had given Edna on the night of the latter's arrival.

Neither girl had undressed. And now, as Edna stood in the partly opened doorway, listening for any sound which would tell her that Fagin was still about, Grace was standing breathlessly behind her.

Both girls were pale. But in the faint light from the bracket lamp Grace's eyes held only a sullen resentment, while Edna's were agleam with determination. Grace appeared to be willing to wait for the day of Fagin's punishment, while Edna, finding inaction intolerable, meant to hasten it.

After listening for a time, Edna stepped out into the hall. She was arrayed in riding togs that she had brought with her. Her light boots, soft and pliable, made no sound as she moved down the hall to the stairway, Grace following her. Grace wore only a house dress, but in her right hand dangled a heavy revolver.

They slipped down the stairs noiselessly, gained the big living room, opened the door and passed out to the porch. They went directly to the stable, where Grace took down a saddle, bridle and a rope. These they carried out and placed on a top rail of the corral fence. Then, as silently as possible, Grace roped a horse, led it to the corral gates, saddled and bridled it, and helped Edna to mount.

"It is right straight west," directed Grace, pointing into the moonlit land. "After you reach the crest of that first big rise you will strike the trail. It is almost a wagon road, and you won't be in any danger of losing it until you get within two miles of Willets, where there is a stretch of broken country.

"But if you lose it there you must keep right on, going as straight as you can, and you'll run right into Willets. Judge Travis lives in a big white house on your right just at the edge of town. Good-by, and don't be afraid for me. If Fagin gets fresh I'll shoot him!"

Edna rode westward, with the moon swimming almost overhead. When she reached the crest of the first rise she turned in the saddle and looked back. She could dimly make out Grace's figure, still at the corral gate. Then Edna rode down the

farther slope of the rise into a strange and ghostly world.

She intended to go straight to Judge Travis. She was worried about Nellie Porter, and convinced that Judge Travis could have no real knowledge of the characters of Fagin and Adams, or he would not have endowed them with so much authority.

With Edna's respect for the law there was also awe and reverence for the men who dispensed justice. She felt that she had only to acquaint Judge Travis with the facts to induce him to countermand the order he had given Adams regarding the guardianship of the Porter girl.

And she was assured that when she told the judge about Nevins's predicament he would hasten to withdraw Fagin from the Circle Dot. She would give a bond, if necessary, as an assurance that she would properly conduct the Circle Dot.

She had questioned Grace about Judge Travis and had learned that Travis was honored and respected in the country. He was implacable and relentless toward all doers of evil. He had been reflected time after time. He was dignified, fearless, and yet kindly.

Edna had tried to induce Grace to accompany her to Judge Travis's house, but Grace had chosen to stay at the Circle Dot. She wasn't afraid of Fagin, she had said. Fagin was smarter than Adams, and not so much like an animal. He'd be autocratic, perhaps, and would make a nuisance of himself with his airs, but he would never use physical force to accomplish his aims.

Grace had always considered Fagin a coward. Anyway, she would stay. If she decided to go anywhere she would ride to Deming, to overtake Seaton and Gadd.

Edna rode steadily, eagerly. She had apprehended some difficulty in finding the Willets trail, and she was therefore relieved when, just beyond the farther slope of the rise she came upon it, a gleaming, undulating ribbon of white in the moonlight.

Twenty miles Grace had told her. For a stretch, where the land was level, she made good time. But when she reached a region featured by low, black hills, she slowed the horse under her and went ahead carefully.

From indeterminate distances she heard the raving of coyotes, the hooting of ground owls, the croaking of tree toads. Wherever possible she rode fast, for the sounds she heard dismayed her. She kept glancing apprehensively back, and she was breathless with a dread of dangers that might be ahead of her, lying in wait.

The character of the country changed. The trail was always visible, although there were times when it made sharp curves that took her into unsuspected ravines and over abrupt rises. But the moonlight held, disclosing the hazards, and after a while she grew calm and confident.

She dropped into a low, broad river bed filled with dry sand. The road ran along the edge, close to the perpendicular banks, where aspen and alder drooped over her head.

She followed the trail out of the river bed to a broad level where giant cottonwood trees arched above her; she went down again into cañons between walls of fantastically carved rocks, their faces hollowed to cavernous depths through long exposure to the elements.

She had not suspected that the country held such magnificent views, and there were times when she halted the horse and sat motionless and enthralled. But the country with the moonlight shining upon it was weird as well as beautiful, and usually, after a halt, she rode on again, shivering with an indefinable dread.

The rim-rock towering above her was mysterious and threatening with deep, dark caverns, entrancing with drooping ferns and long-bladed grass that fringed it like drooping lace. She decided that some day she would ride here and view the place when the sun shone upon it, and revealed the true color values.

She encountered other sections equally beautiful before she again ascended to a level, where she could look downward into the slumbering lowlands.

By the time she crossed the level the moon was shining directly into her face. It was swimming low, and she felt that if she did not hurry it would sink below the level of the mountains westward and she would reach the section where the trail vanished

in that darkest interval of the night, just before dawn.

The level ended in a long, downward slope which dipped into a big basin. Already the farther reaches of the basin were dark, although about half way out into the saucer-shaped hollow the moonlight was brilliant. Half an hour later she looked back and saw the moonlight behind her, and she felt she was riding into a wall of somber darkness.

In another half hour she felt the darkness had swallowed her. She could no longer see the trail. Far away, eastward, she could see the moonlight touching the peaks of some mountains, but ahead of her was an impenetrable black gulf.

Grimly she rode into it, although she made no attempt to guide the horse. She rode him carefully, with a good grip on the reins and her knees pressing his sides. If he stumbled and fell she meant to stay with him, for she knew that if he fell and she were to tumble out of the saddle, she could never find him again. She didn't care to travel through that country on foot.

The horse went on and on. There were now no landmarks that she could see, to determine how fast she was traveling, no features of the landscape by which she might mark the progress she was making. Ahead was nothing but a blank darkness, immeasurable, yawning.

After a while, from the fact that her body persisted in sliding forward in the saddle, she knew they were descending a slope. The slope was long and the horse stumbled occasionally, and at each stumble she caught her breath sharply. But they got down ultimately. She became aware of that when she ceased sliding forward.

Then there came an interval in which the horse traveled steadily, evenly. In this interval Edna felt a strong, pungent breeze striking her left cheek, pressing against her. When she could no longer feel the breeze she decided they were in some timber. And when once a branch scraped the top of her head and knocked her hat off, she crouched low in the saddle.

She sat, trembling, when the horse suddenly halted. For a time she was in a frenzy of fear and dread, for she thought of rob-

bers and other evil riders, and she shrank in the saddle, expecting each instant to hear a gruff voice or feel hands clutching at her. When there came no sound or movement around her she sighed audibly with relief. And then she remembered of having read tales of horses halting of their own volition upon approaching dangerous spots such as cliffs and ditches, and she endeavored to penetrate the blackness ahead of her in an effort to see what obstructed.

She could see nothing. She was assailed with a sensation of futility, of helplessness. She did not dare urge the horse onward for fear of a catastrophe, and so she continued to sit, vacillating, uncertain.

She leaned forward, resting her hands upon the high pommel of the saddle. The movement took her head forward a little and a glimmer of light, like a pin point in the vast darkness, flashed in her eyes. She turned quickly to face the pin point. It was to her left, and so far away that at first it appeared to be a low-hanging star.

But it was too low for a star. It was, in fact, lower than the ground upon which her horse stood. And so she finally decided it was down in a valley.

A house was there, probably, And perhaps the light shone through a window. Possibly the presence of the light explained the action of the horse in halting. The animal, unguided, had been uncertain of her destination, and was awaiting her pleasure.

There probably was a trail leading toward the light; the horse must have seen it. She didn't know if there was still a trail stretching out ahead of her. If she had reached the edge of the broken country about which Grace had warned her, there would be no trail westward, and she ought to ride straight ahead.

The trouble was that she didn't know whether she had been riding straight. It was quite possible that she might have been riding off at an angle for some little time, for since the moon had gone down she hadn't been able to see anything.

Of course, the horse would follow the trail as long as there was a trail, but the point was that he might have passed the end of the trail some time ago. It might even be

possible that the light she saw was one of the lights of Willets.

She looked back. Blackness. There were a few stars, remote, almost obscured, and a dull, semiluminous haze in the sky. There was nothing by which she could establish a sense of direction, and as she continued to speculate she began to have a feeling that she would be doing wrong to urge the horse. Left alone, he would probably take her straight to Willets, whereas, if she attempted to guide him, she might get lost or go plunging down a precipice.

Obedying a sudden impulse, she gently struck the animal with the quirt she carried. Instantly the horse swerved, lunged, and galloped toward the light.

She was almost satisfied now, and she watched with interest as the light grew larger in her vision. The further she rode the firmer became her conviction that the light was in Willets, and that she would have been foolish to reject the wisdom of the animal she rode.

Again she became aware that they were descending, and thus was vindicated her conclusion that the light could not be a star.

She rode for half an hour, while the light drew closer, and she tried to distinguish its character. After a while she decided it was rectangular and was therefore coming through a window or a door. When she drew near enough to perceive that it was shining through a window, she found herself in a dense wood, for light beams from the window shone on the branches and leaves of trees.

Deep in the woods she halted the horse and sat motionless in the saddle, listening, peering about her.

If the light came from a window of a house in Willets, why weren't there more lights? This interrogation was, she felt, founded upon her fear that this might not be Willets after all. Willets must be a little town, and it would not be odd that in such a place only one house should be illuminated. It was more astonishing that at this hour there should be any light at all!

When that thought assailed her she grew apprehensive, and she tried hard to detect the outlines of other buildings. When she failed she resolutely closed her lips, took

up the reins and urged the horse forward until she reached a point at the edge of the wood where some tall brush grew. The brush screened her, and she sat there for some time with all her senses alert, trying to detect the unusual.

The house was now outlined to her against a background of star haze that had a greenish-yellow, phosphorous light, and she observed that the house was a one story affair with a low, flat roof. It had, she felt, only two rooms. One was dark, while the light she had been seeing shone through a window of the other.

There was a low, rambling porch across the front of the house, which faced eastward, and she could distinguish the slender, crooked poles which, answering as columns, supported the roof. Back of the house she could see the dim tracery of a fence. From a point off to her right she could hear a calf bleating. In the wood behind her were the indescribable noises of the timber denizens; to her ears from a distance came the shrill barking of coyotes.

She was frightened. She sat, fighting an impulse to wheel her horse and return to the Circle Dot. At this instant she regretted starting on the trip when she had. She might have waited until the dawn, though she knew that if she had waited Fagin would not have permitted her to leave.

By concentrating her thoughts upon Nellie Porter she succeeded in conquering her fear, and at last she dismounted, trailed the reins over the head of the horse and walked toward the house. She felt she was now lost—unless this house was in Willets—but she did not intend to reveal herself to the inhabitants of the dwelling until she made an effort to discover what kind of people they were.

She moved to the rear of the building until she reached a wall. Making her way stealthily along the wall she reached the window through which the light came. A bush with heavy foliage grew beside the window and, screened by that, she peered into the room.

The light came from a kerosene lamp upon a big, rough table near the center of the room. A man sat on one corner of the

table. One of his legs was drawn under him, the other dangled almost to the floor. He was facing the window through which Edna was watching.

His left arm was bent across his chest, the hand caught under the right armpit; the right arm was crooked at the elbow, the forearm perpendicular, the hand was at his chin, and a thumb and forefinger were engaged in pressing his lower lip, the finger on one side, the thumb on the other.

The man's gaze seemed to be fixed directly on the window at which Edna was watching, and she quickly dodged back, fearful that he had seen her. But when after an interval she heard no sound she looked again, to see that he was still sitting in the same position, his gaze still on the window.

He was in deep thought. His gaze was introspective and he did not see the window at which he appeared to be looking.

He was tall, handsome, distinguished. His complexion was that which Edna had heard described as "sandy." He had a good chin, a broad forehead, a nose of the type known as Grecian. Edna thought his mouth was a trifle large and his lips a little too full.

But his hair interested her; his hair and his eyes. The eyes were dreamy, although big and clear. They were the eyes of a poet or a lazy man. They lacked the keen hardness of the alert captain of business, and yet they had fire in them, the fire of deep, intense thought. Also, they held a glint of recklessness. Just now the man was lost in thought, but Edna felt that when aroused he must be a commanding figure.

His hair was a rich, dark red. It was wavy and abundant. When Edna had first looked in through the window at him a fiery lock had dropped over his forehead, giving him a singularly rakish appearance. His age Edna felt she was not competent to determine, though she was certain he could not be more than thirty.

He was arrayed in a flannel shirt of dark gray with a high, turn-down collar, well-worn black leather chaps, soft-top boots, spurs, cartridge belt, pistol. There was a knife sheath in the left leg of the chaps. His broad brimmed hat lay on the table beside him.

There was another man in the room. He

was of medium height and dark. His black hair was long and straight, his nose thin and drooping, his mouth large, the lips thin and loose. His chin receded slightly, and his neck where it was exposed by the open collar of his shirt, was scrawny and corded.

His eyes were black, lambent, roving. At the instant Edna looked at him he was grinning up into the face of the red haired man. He was sitting in a chair at the table.

"Well, then," he said, "I reckon she's all shaped up?"

The window was open; the man's voice was clear and distinct. The red haired man smiled.

"Looks that way," he answered.

"But look here, chief," continued the dark man, "suppose the soldiers find out about that Indian deal?"

The red haired man laughed. The laugh was deep, rich, vibrant.

"That's likely, isn't it, Naylor?" he scoffed. "It seems to me Fagin and Adams reported there weren't any Indians left to do any talking. You were there yourself, weren't you?" he charged, swinging around. "You saw to that, didn't you?"

Naylor seemed to cringe under the accusation in the red haired man's voice. He flushed, stammered:

"Sure. There wasn't—there couldn't none of them hev got away. But you can't always tell. Mebbe them redskins thet busted away from the reservation had talked to some of their friends before they left. An' thet damned major over to Fort Bayard is just nosey enough to go smellin' around."

The "chief" laughed again. "They couldn't possibly find anything to it other than just another uprising. Don't get uneasy, Naylor."

"Well, then," said Naylor, "if thet's all set, when we goin' to begin on them herds?"

"We're not going to be in a hurry about that," replied the chief. "Haste right now would bring suspicion upon us. We've got to have patience. There's a lot of cattle to dispose of. Fagin estimates there are more than six thousand head at the Circle Dot. Porter had upward of fifteen hundred, though they are pretty well scattered. Hamlin must have had a couple of thousand. That's about ten thousand, roughly.

"We can drive some to Deming. We'll get others over to Rincon. We'll have to do it slow and easy." He paused meditatively, and his eyes were gleaming with a light so soft and tender that Edna, intently watching them, found it hard to believe that she had only just now heard him convict himself of knowledge of the terrible crime of permitting a massacre.

She stood, her knees knocking together, fascinated, paralyzed. She could not have moved from the window if she had known that the next instant he would discover her.

"I don't want any of you boys to go near the Circle Dot. Fagin can take care of that," resumed the chief.

Naylor smirked slyly.

"She's thoroughbred, chief," he said.

"Meaning Miss Pendleton," returned the other. His eyes were glowing. "Yes, she's beautiful," he added. "I saw her in Deming the day she arrived." He laughed. "It's too damned bad Matt Blandell didn't succeed in hanging that fool dude who came here with her!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed Naylor; "thet sure was a mighty close shave for thet dude! An' Matt thinkin' he was hangin' Ross Nevins!" His eyes grew vindictive. "But anyhow, Matt got Hamlin. She worked out pretty good!" he exulted.

"But not good enough," said the chief. "Adams says Nevins beat Logan to the draw."

"Killed him?"

"Yes. I told Logan to be careful. Nevins is lightning with a gun."

"Whar's Nevins now?"

"Nobody knows. None of the boys have seen him since he left the Circle Dot. We've got to get him some way. He's bad medicine when he's aroused!"

Naylor pursed his lips, frowned.

The red haired man slipped off the table, stood up and yawned. He was tall and muscular, and there was a smooth, animal-like ease in his movement.

"Well," he said, "bed suits me. We've ridden quite a distance to-night."

"Fifty miles if we rode a foot," confirmed Naylor. "I'm kind of fagged out myself."

Edna drew away from the window. She

was reeling dizzily when she made her way to the edge of the wood where she had left her horse, and when she reached the animal she leaned against it and clutched the high pommel of the saddle to support herself.

Although she was aware of her danger, she lacked the strength to climb into the saddle. For she had thought the incidents of the last few days were those unrelated happenings which occasionally mar the quiet peacefulness of everyday life—tragedies which are the result of passion.

Now she had discovered that behind all the tragedy was sinister purpose, comprehensive scheming and ruthless force. The red haired man, Naylor, Fagin, Adams and a number of other men, were in league against Nevins, Hamlin's wife, Nellie Porter and herself. They would rob and murder to attain their aims.

Somehow she got on the back of the horse, wheeled him and sent him plunging into the night.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RED-HAIRED MAN.

WHEN the dawn came Edna was sitting upon her horse in the center of a vast section of wild, virgin country, straining her eyes in an effort to distinguish a trail.

She was lost. She had passed the Willets trail in the darkness, for her only thought when riding away from the cabin had been to place as great a distance as possible between herself and the red haired man.

The section which was disclosed to her by the first streaks of dawn, was desolate and trackless. No trail crossed it. She was in the center of a sea of saccaton grass, and the wire-edged blades clutched at her stirrups and rustled raspingly as they bowed to the slight breeze. On two sides of her were high ridges of ragged rock. Behind her was a stretch of open country, ahead was an undulating slope that appeared to go up until it merged into the dull gray sky. A fleecy mist was floating around her, with wisplike streamers that disintegrated and evaporated as she watched them.

But although she was lost, she was slowly recovering from the horror of the night's revelation and her determination to go to Judge Travis was unshaken. She meant to tell him what she had heard and after telling him she would demand the protection of the law.

To her astonishment she had overcome her fright. A short time ago, even on the day she had arrived in Deming, she would have doubted that she possessed the courage to ride nearly all night through a wild country without an escort.

For in the old days, that somehow seemed remote as though belonging to the dim past, men had figuratively danced at her heels wherever she went, and she would not have considered it possible for her to do what she had done last night. She was rather amazed at her courage, and as she sat in the saddle watching the sky and the desolate land, she decided that if it wasn't for worrying about Nellie Porter she would have enjoyed her experience.

Yet she was more amazed to discover that she was developing ability to experience emotion. Hitherto, she had been bored by people who exhibited passion. She had considered them ill-bred, common. Continued repression had made her unsympathetic.

A few days before her arrival in Deming she would have cared little what might happen to the Nellie Porters of the world; now she was seething with eagerness to help her. And she thought she knew what had happened to her. The series of tragedies which had quickly followed her arrival at Deming had startled her into revealing the dormant humanness of normal womanhood.

When she perceived that the gray streak of light on the horizon was widening, she recovered her sense of direction. She headed the horse away from the growing light and sent him against the upland. And when she was at last riding the level land of a high mesa, she again found the Willets trail.

An hour later she was in the section of broken country about which Grace Rignal had warned her. But she was confident now, and although she slowed her horse and rode carefully, she went on steadily until the broken stretch was behind and she saw Willets directly in front of her.

Willets, she felt, hardly deserved the dignity of a name. It was a collection of shanties and stores huddled together on a level near a small river. The doors of the stores were closed when she rode down the dusty street; there was no one in sight. A dog barked at her sharply and then subsided.

When she came to a large white house at the farther edge of the town, she felt from Grace's description that Judge Travis occupied it, and so she rode boldly to the front porch, dismounted and knocked on the front door.

After a short wait she heard footsteps inside. The door creaked, opened a trifle, and a thin-faced woman looked out at her.

"The judge?" she queried, answering Edna's question. "Well, yes, I reckon he's here. But he left word he wasn't to be disturbed early. You'd better go along an' come back after a while. The judge ain't no early riser."

Edna smiled.

"It is early, isn't it?" she said. "I hadn't thought of that. But won't you tell him that I won't take but a minute of his time?"

"Huh. Well, I'll see."

The woman vanished, the door closed. So deep was the silence outside that Edna could hear the woman's footsteps as she walked through the house. The sound died away, and the silence was complete.

There followed a five minute interval in which Edna stood scanning the featureless country surrounding the town. She was on the point of deciding that the thin-faced woman had no intention of waking Judge Travis when she heard sound from within.

The sound was that of a footstep on a bare floor. It was heavy. Edna thought of a boot heel. And she somehow got the impression that the owner of the boots was irritated.

But she wasn't dismayed at that. She was resolved that justice must be done, and she faced the door eagerly.

The door opened and a man's head appeared. The hair was tousled; the man's eyes were blinking, and they held an expression of irritation, just as Edna expected.

She had been conning over the words of her opening sentence, and she knew just

what she had intended to say to the judge. But she stood there speechless, dazed, bewildered, her brain reeling with amazement as the man spoke brusquely:

"I'm Judge Travis. What can I do for you?"

For the man, despite his tousled hair and his blinking eyes, and the fact that he was in Willets when she thought he was sleeping at a certain cabin miles eastward, was the red haired man whom Naylor had addressed as "chief"!

CHAPTER XX.

A RUNAWAY TONGUE.

EDNA PENDLETON had not acquired the slightly arrogant manner which had antagonized Nevins without gaining in addition the ability to control her emotions. Therefore, although the revelation of the red haired man's identity had thrown her into confusion, she succeeded in disguising her feelings.

Her wide-eyed amazement became self-deprecation, and her dismay seemed merely natural feminine shyness to Judge Travis, whose eyes were no longer blinking, but were now gleaming with bold admiration.

He ran a hand through his hair, smoothing it. And he smiled engagingly.

"Vain," was Edna's thought.

"I am Judge Travis," he said. "What can I do for you?"

Although, since Edna had overheard Travis and Naylor talking, she was aware that she could hope for no assistance from the man who stood before her, she felt that she must go ahead just as if she had no knowledge of his real character. She must dissemble, she must not let him suspect that she knew of his scheme to rob and murder several of the inhabitants of the section.

"I am Edna Pendleton, of the Circle Dot," she said quietly, although inwardly she was yearning to tell him that she was aware of his despicable character, and that she hated him because of the light in his eyes at that minute—a light which expressed avid interest—"and I have come here to talk to you about Nellie Porter."

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Pendleton," the judge rejoined. "Come in, if you will excuse my appearance. We can talk better."

She entered as he stepped back and held the door open for her. She did not take the chair he motioned to, but stood just inside the door—which he closed—watching him and wondering how any man could be so hypocritical. For she felt that if she had not possessed knowledge of his real character she would never have suspected him capable of doing the things he had done.

He appeared to her, as he stood there smiling, an entirely different person than he had seemed last night in the cabin when talking with Naylor. There was a dignity in his manner which even his tousled appearance did not affect; a judicial atmosphere which transcended mere clothing surrounded him.

As a matter of fact Edna had a conviction that the loose fitting house coat he wore could not have been more becoming to him than the flowing robe of a Supreme Court justice. He was, she felt, one of those men who look better when carelessly attired than when arrayed in the habiliments of fashion.

He was so magnetic a personality that a quaver of apprehension swept over Edna as she watched him, a fear that he would win her admiration in spite of what she knew about him.

"Won't you take a chair?" he asked.

"No, thank you. My business won't take long. I merely want to ask you to rescind your order appointing Brandt Adams guardian over Nellie Porter."

"So Adams had visited the Circle Dot? Why do you object to Adams as guardian for Nellie Porter?"

"In my opinion he is not qualified to act as guardian of a young girl."

"What makes you think so, Miss Pendleton?"

"He isn't a gentleman," answered Edna.

"Ah," smiled the judge.

The smile exasperated Edna.

"He is a brute!" She declared. And then she related what had happened on the porch in the Circle Dot ranch house when

Fagin and Adams had demanded the custody of Nellie Porter.

During the recital Travis listened attentively, intently watching her. At the end he smiled tolerantly.

"Adams and Fagin were acting with full authority, Miss Pendleton. It seems to me that you were the one at fault. Don't you know that you were obstructing an officer of the court in the performance of his duty?"

Edna momentarily lost her temper. The thought that Travis could stand there and defend Adams and Fagin when she knew he was as guilty as they, and she not able to tell him so, enraged her. She felt she must let him know that she had a suspicion of the work the men were engaged in.

She told Travis of the conversation she had overheard in Deming, hinging upon the question of a Two Diamond cow. Nevins, it had seemed to her, had suspected Adams and Fagin of doing something they should not have done.

Travis laughed easily, smoothly.

"Nevins didn't make any specific charge, then?" he asked.

"No; but it was easy to understand that Nevins suspected them of stealing!" declared Edna.

"And would you want me to condemn Adams because Nevins suspected him?" asked Travis.

"Yes!" she answered. "Because Mr. Nevins is an honest man!"

"A woman's reason, Miss Pendleton. A woman's judgment."

He stood, his arms folded over his chest, looking at her. In his present attitude he lost his appearance of judicial dignity; he looked as he had looked last night when in the cabin talking with Naylor. There was a mocking glint in his eyes. She saw his lips curve into a faint, derisive smile.

"Women are constitutionally and notoriously inaccurate in their judgment of men, Miss Pendleton," he announced slowly. "And I feel that you have based your judgment upon appearances."

He laughed as if deeply amused. "Adams isn't much to look at, for a fact," he added, "while Nevins is of a type to influence women."

Edna felt her composure going. She no longer saw Travis as a judge; the dignity she had detected in his appearance had vanished. She was seeing him now as Fagin's chief; a sinister, wanton figure of evil. The smile on his lips aroused in her a turgid fury.

If she had not seen him last night she might have been deceived by the smile, for she perceived that he was attempting to make it tolerant and kindly. To her the smile revealed him as he was—a mocker, a sleek, suave criminal masquerading as an honest man.

Her rage conquered her. She felt she must drive the mocking smile from his lips. And so with her voice cold from the scorn and contempt that filled her, she told him what she had seen the night before while looking into the cabin window.

When, breathless, she finished, she realized that she had made a mistake. The only apparent effect her words had upon him was to change the character of his smile. It was now twisting, speculative.

"So you heard that, eh?" he said. "You didn't miss a word of it?"

"And that is why you appointed Fagin and Adams!" she declared.

"Yes," he admitted. He was watching her intently.

"And now that you know these things what do you intend doing?" he added slowly, quietly.

"I intend to ride straight to Deming and tell Sheriff Callahan what I have discovered!"

He laughed.

"You recognized me when I opened the door," he said. "You pretended you hadn't. Why?"

"I—I thought perhaps I had made a mistake."

"No, that isn't the explanation," he said. "You were startled, afraid. You talked to gain time to get your thoughts together. You intended to go to Callahan just as soon as you could get out of here without arousing my suspicions. Why didn't you keep quiet? You might have got away with it." He grinned when she reddened. "Temper, eh?" he mocked.

She was silent, watching him.

"Too much temper is a bad thing," he went on. "Yours has got you into trouble. A great deal of trouble, I think. You see, you know too much about me, and if you went to Callahan with your story there would be an investigation in which the soldiers from Fort Bayard would take a hand. That would make things very uncomfortable for me. I shall have to take measures to keep you from talking."

Edna's face had whitened. Yet she faced him courageously, defiantly.

"I shall talk just as soon as I can get to Sheriff Callahan!" she declared.

"Ah!" he said softly, "that's just it. Therefore, you will never reach Callahan."

She moved toward the door, and to her vast amazement, considering the threat of his words and manner, he made no move to stop her. He stood, watching her, his eyes narrowed and gleaming. And when she opened the door and stood for an instant in the opening looking back at him, still amazed, he shook his head negatively.

"No," he said, "there won't be any struggle in the doorway. Did you expect it? My dear girl, I couldn't keep you here. You ride right along to Deming. It's quite a distance. About a hundred miles. But don't waste any time telling your story to anybody in Willets. These people here are my friends."

He stood in the doorway watching her as she mounted, and when she had ridden a little distance from the house she turned in the saddle and looked back at him.

He was still standing in the open doorway, watching her. He was smiling.

The smile appalled her. She rode through the little town, apprehensively glancing at the closed doors and windows of the buildings. There was no sign of life or movement.

Thoroughly frightened by the silence, by contemplation of the distance she must ride to reach the Circle Dot or Deming, and by the enigma of Travis's manner, she rode a few miles at breakneck speed. The trail led downward in a long, gradual slope and when she reached the edge of a broad level at the bottom of the slope she looked back.

And when, at the edge of town she saw a horse and rider coming toward her, she

gave the animal under her his head and fled recklessly into the yawning distance that stretched before her.

CHAPTER XXI.

BLOCKADED.

BEFORE Edna had ridden a mile she knew she had made her second mistake of the morning. The horse she rode had been traveling since midnight the night before, and in that time had had neither feed nor water, and the terrific pace at which he had traveled the mile after she had sighted the horseman at the edge of Willets had winded him. She heard his breath coming in shrill wheezes, and she despairingly searched for a covert in which she might hide in an effort to throw the horseman off her trail.

But there was no covert. The level was featureless except for clumps of cactus growing here and there, and some rolling corrugations which were not deep enough to offer concealment. Far away to her left was a line of timber, but the horseman had kept in sight of her and she knew she would not be able to escape in that direction.

So, clenching her teeth determinedly, she lashed the horse with the quirt she carried. The action drew a burst of speed out of the animal, but presently he began to falter again, and despite all her urging the pace grew slower and slower.

Meantime, the pursuing horseman came on at a pace that now seemed leisurely. It appeared to Edna that he was enjoying her plight and, there being no danger of interference, was permitting her to ride until the horse would carry her no farther.

Once, when the horse stumbled and halted, to stand with its legs braced while it shrilled breath into its lungs, the horseman also halted and sat motionless in the saddle, watching her. He was, she estimated, perhaps a half mile distant.

Later, when her horse went on again, the rider followed. In a shallow arroyo which descended to a gully, her horse again halted. This time, having reached the end of the level land, she could not see the horseman immediately.

But after a short interval, just when she was meditating deserting the horse and taking to foot in an effort to seek concealment in some wild brush that grew at the bottom of the gully, she saw the horseman appear on the edge of the plain above.

Again he halted and watched her. He was not more than a few hundred feet distant now and she got a good view of his face.

The horseman was Naylor, the man who had been with Travis in the cabin the night before.

But she was not greatly surprised, for if her pursuer hadn't been Naylor, it would have been another of Travis's friends. She realized now the reason for his strange unconcern, for his decision not to attempt to hold her in Willets.

She felt she also knew what he had meant when he had warned her of the uselessness of disclosing her predicament to any of the town's inhabitants. The reason was that all the people who lived in Willets were his friends and he could depend upon them to offer her no assistance. And she had hardly left the town when he had set Naylor upon her trail.

Somehow, she didn't fear Naylor. Naylor was under orders, and the fact that he so far hadn't attempted to molest her indicated that he didn't intend violence. Naylor had been sent to capture her.

There was little doubt of his ability to do that, and it appeared to her that he was merely waiting for her to reach a certain point before he attempted it.

She got her horse going again. She rode him down into the gulley, and through the place until she reached a stream of water that intersected it.

The horse refused to go farther. He halted at the bank of the stream, plunged his muzzle into the water, and drank.

Naylor rode close and sat in the saddle, watching. Edna did not look at him, although she had heard him approach.

"I reckon he'll founder hisself, ma'am," he said.

"Oh!" she exclaimed scornfully. "So you are here! Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me why you have been following me?"

"I reckon there's no secret about that, ma'am. Travis was tellin' me to follow you."

"For what reason?"

She now looked at Naylor, and the man reddened under the scathing glance she gave him.

"He was sayin' you knowed somethin' an' that you wasn't to get to Deming or the Circle Dot."

"The beast!"

Naylor was silent. He appeared reluctant and apologetic, although sullenly determined.

Edna said no more to him just then. While her horse was still drinking she slid out of the saddle and darted toward the wild brush that fringed the sloping side of the gully. She had taken only a dozen steps when she heard a swishing over her head and a noose settled down over her shoulders, pinned her arms to her sides and brought her to a sudden halt.

Silently she fought to free herself. But the more she struggled the tighter grew the rope. She saw Naylor's horse backing, keeping the rope taut. The range bred animal would permit her to get no slack in the rope.

Naylor slid off the horse and leaped toward her. She kicked viciously at him, but missed.

And then, in spite of her furious resistance Naylor tied her hands behind her with a piece of "hogging" rope. Next, while she still silently struggled, he picked her up bodily and carried her to his horse.

He placed her in the saddle and swung up behind her. Without a word he took up the reins and sent the horse down the gully at a fair rate of speed.

Edna was too furiously angry to talk, and Naylor in no mood to say anything. They went on silently.

Half a mile or so from where the capture had taken place Naylor urged the horse out of the gully and sent him off at a tangent, through some timber. Later he wheeled the horse again and crossed a stretch of plain.

Within half an hour from the time she had felt the noose settle over her shoulders, Edna was riding a trail which looked fa-

miliar. But it was not until she saw a cabin ahead of her that she realized Naylor was taking her to the place where the night before she had seen him and Travis through a window.

Once more, when Naylor dismounted and lifted her down, she tried to escape. This time Naylor lost patience with her. He leaped after her, seized her roughly, and growled:

"Damn you, if you try that again I'll truss you!"

She didn't know what the term "truss" meant, but she gathered from Naylor's tone that it was something violent and unusual, so she was passive while Naylor carried her into the cabin and placed her in a chair.

"Now, if you know what's best for you, you'll stay where you are put!" he declared.

"There ain't no sense of you tryin' to get away, anyhow!" he added. "The chief don't mean to let you go anywhere until he's had a chanst to palaver. You was a damn fool to ride over here, anyway!"

He went out, locking the door behind him. An hour later she saw him pass one of the windows, and she called to him, asking him to come in and loosen the ropes which bound her hands together, for her hands were numb and her arms aching.

Naylor entered, looked at the rope.

"I reckon you ain't got a hell of a chanst to get away, anyhow," he decided. "You ain't got no hoss, an' walkin' ain't no picnic. Besides, I'll be hangin' around."

He removed the rope and moved to the door, where he stood and watched her as she got up from the chair and rubbed her wrists to restore circulation. Then she faced him.

"Naylor," she said, "if you will let me go I promise to say nothing about your being concerned with what has happened to Watt Hamlin and the Porters. I will even swear that you were helping me all the time!"

"That's no good," Naylor replied. He smiled crookedly. "There ain't no chanst of you gettin' away. Travis was sendin' some of the boys south, to watch all the trails, in case I didn't ketch you. You'll never get to where you can do any talkin'!

"I reckon you don't know Travis. You'll be sorry you rode over this way. An' whatever he does to you, nobody will interfere!"

He went outside, locked the door.

Edna stood for a time, thinking of Naylor's words. Their suggestion of impending evil had filled her with dismay, but it had been the man's manner which had really convinced her of the hopelessness of trying to escape.

Naylor was impressed with a sense of Travis's omnipotence. It was evident that Naylor felt that when once Travis decided, there was absolutely no use in attempting to fight back. One might as well surrender with what grace one could.

Curiously, Edna had received the same impression of the man. Facing him in his house she had felt the force of him, the quiet, smooth power of his personality, his ruthlessness, his complete conviction of his superiority over all men. She remembered that there had even been a good natured tolerance in his manner when he had spoken of Nevins, and she knew Nevins was himself a strong, rugged character.

As she stood in the room of the cabin now, her thoughts went to last night, when she had seen him sitting on the edge of the table which was at that instant close to her. A great fear of him welled up in her, shortening her breath, bringing a queer constriction into her throat, and in that instant she decided she would rather die by Naylor's gun than be imprisoned in the cabin to wait until Travis came. She wouldn't face him!

One of the windows of the room in which she stood was open. While watching Naylor she had discovered that at frequent intervals he passed the window. Often he stood just in front of it for a few minutes, shading his hands as he peered westward. She felt that Naylor was momentarily expecting Travis to appear. Naylor was impatient. Two or three times she had heard him curse.

Edna went to a cast iron stove that stood in a corner of the room and took up the short, heavy iron poker she found there. Then she stole to the wall near the window and waited.

Twice as she stood beside the window

with the poker upraised Naylor passed just beyond reach of the implement. But the third time he passed he came close to the window, and Edna leaned out and struck with all her force.

She felt that she had not struck accurately, for the poker glanced from Naylor's head and struck one of his shoulders. It flew out of her grasp, but she saw Naylor go down, and she was certain she had stunned him. So she climbed through the window and dropped beside him, intending to run to his horse, mount it and do her best to reach the Circle Dot in spite of the riders Travis had thrown out to intercept her.

She stepped over Naylor. As she did so, one of his hands flashed out and grasped her right ankle, throwing her off balance. She fell upon an arm and shoulder, kicked herself free and scrambled to her feet as Naylor rose and threw himself at her. Naylor slipped as he lunged, for his shoulder struck her in the back, throwing her headlong against the wall of the cabin.

There was a terrific roaring in her ears. A vast darkness, strangely dotted with little splotches of light, seemed to surround her. Then came an interval in which she heard nothing, saw nothing.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SECRET WOUND.

IT seemed to Edna that she was floating upward out of a black pit when she again discerned the little splotches of light. The roaring in her ears had diminished, although there had been one great crash which still seemed to reverberate like a great gun being fired at a distance. She could not definitely fix the time when the great gun had boomed; she was in doubt as to whether it had sounded before the splotches of light appeared or afterward.

When she opened her eyes to see daylight around her, she was still trying to determine the moment of the great crash, and not for several seconds did she become aware that a man's face was in her vision, and that the man's face was Nevins's.

She was lying comfortably; she felt a pillow under her head. And after a time

she realized that Nevins was sitting on a chair close to her, intently and reassuringly watching her.

Her first emotion was one of great astonishment.

"How on earth did you get here?" she asked. "I am still in the cabin, I suppose?"

He answered the last question first.

"Yes; you are still here," he said. "I just happened along, an' saw Naylor divin' at you."

She sat erect, gazing dizzily around.

"Where is Naylor now?" she asked.

"He's where he won't devil a woman again."

"Dead?"

He nodded.

She cringed, horrified, and watched him through a silence.

At last, feeling that she needed to explain her presence at the cabin, she told him why she had come, and that on her way back from Willets, Naylor had seized her.

"I reckoned it was somethin' like that," he remarked. "I saw your wrists." He was watching her narrowly, and she thought that in his eyes she could detect a gleam of admiration.

"So you saw Travis," he said. "An' did he offer to help you?"

"Help me!"

He smiled without mirth at the scorn in her voice. She told him of her talk with Travis and related what she had overheard between Travis and Naylor. After the entire story had been told, she was astonished that Nevins showed no surprise.

"You knew Travis?" she asked. "You knew he was behind those murders?"

"No," he said. "But I ain't surprised. I'd sized Travis up as bein' that kind of a man." She observed a troubled light come into his eyes.

"You shouldn't have interfered," he said. "You shouldn't have come here. It was a mighty brave thing to do, but foolish. A woman has no business ridin' around this country alone."

She felt the logic of his reproof, but she defiantly told him she did not regret her action.

"I would do it again, in the same circumstances," she declared. "I could not let Nellie Porter go with Adams without offering some objection!"

"No," he conceded, the odd glint again in his eyes, "you couldn't." He smiled. "But it can't be helped now. You've forced Travis to show his hand, an' now we've got to fight him in the open." For an instant a fire smoldered in his eyes and then died out, an ironic gleam remaining.

"If Travis has thrown his men out, as he told Naylor, we ain't in shape to do a terrible lot of fightin'. Travis has about fifty men at his beck an' call, if we count those that have been suspected of crooked deals. I reckon right now Travis has thrown a ring around this section, to keep you from gettin' away."

"But you got through," she said hopefully.

"I've been through," he answered. "I've been two days gettin' this far from the Circle Dot. Last night an' the day before I was restin', not feelin' very much like ridin'. I wasn't half a mile from here. But I was headed for here, knowin' the place."

"This is the old Rignal ranch," he went on. "The Rignals lived here until they died. I came over an' got Grace. The house hasn't been used until now. Though it looks like Travis an' his gang have been here a lot. While you was unconscious I was lookin' around. There's a big stock of supplies, grub an' such. They must have stayed here often."

She detected a queer note in his voice, a note that she had not heard while he had been at the Circle Dot, a note that somehow seemed to express weariness or an indifference far greater than he had ever betrayed in her presence. She looked at him critically and perceived that his face was strangely flushed and that his eyes were extraordinarily bright.

He was not aware of her scrutiny, and while she watched him he drew out his heavy revolver, stuck it between his knees, opened the cylinder and with his right hand drew out two smoke-blackened, empty cartridges. Then, still using his right hand, he drew two fresh cartridges from the belt around his waist, inserted them into the

chambers he had emptied, snapped the cylinder back into place and replaced the weapon in its holster.

He had made no attempt to use his left hand; during the process of unloading and reloading the revolver the left hand had hung limply at his side.

With an inward gasp, Edna remembered that his left arm had been injured in the fight with Logan, the deputy.

She stiffened as she looked at his hand. It was swollen badly and inflamed. The fingers were puffed and stiff.

She knew what had happened. Fever had set in; the arm and hand were infected. For an instant, as a chill of apprehension stole over her, she sat nerveless and bewildered.

And in that instant she realized that upon awakening and seeing him sitting near her, she had depended upon him to extricate her from the danger that threatened her. Now she knew that if Nevins's condition grew worse her chances of escape would be lessened.

But she knew also that she would not desert him. The thought of doing so never occurred to her. A queer, cold calm stole over her as she watched him.

He sat, his head bowed a little, his shoulders swaying a little. He was apparently unconscious of her presence, and she knew that the fever, raging through him, had weakened him.

She got up quickly, took a tin basin from the kitchen, went outside and filled the basin with water, tore a piece of cloth from an undergarment and reentered the room where Nevins still sat, his chin on his chest.

He said nothing as she ripped the sleeve of his shirt open and folded it back into the arm hole of his vest. She grew very white as the arm was disclosed to her sight, for it was much puffed and great, angry-looking streaks ran for a considerable distance from a wound in the forearm.

Logan's bullet had gone clear through the arm at a point several inches from the elbow, or about midway between the elbow and the wrist. The wound was through the big muscle, and she felt it had missed the bone.

He must have lost much blood, although the wound would not have been dangerous had it received proper treatment.

Twice while she bathed the arm she was compelled to leave the room to regain her composure, for there were times when her hands trembled so much that she almost dropped the basin of water.

Nevins watched her. His eyes were clear and sane. The fever had not attacked his reason; he was merely weak from loss of blood. And he seemed indifferent to the danger that now threatened both of them.

Later, when she had finished bandaging the arm, he stood erect and looked at her. His face was unnaturally flushed.

"Thank you," he said, "that feels a lot better. But if this place is what you say it is, we'd better be makin' tracks out of here. You don't want to be around here when Travis an' his gang get here."

He stood, reeling just a little as he gazed at some shelves on the kitchen wall.

"There's grub," he said. "You'll be needin' it. You'll have to hide out for a few days. I know a place where nobody will find you. You can't go back to the Circle Dot. Fagin's there, an' Fagin ain't to be trusted. An' there 'll be others there. You'd never get to Deming."

He pointed to a gunny sack lying on the floor in a corner of the kitchen. "We'll fill that with grub," he added. "Then I'll take you to that place I was tellin' you about. After you're settled, I'll come back here an' lay for Travis an' his bunch. An' after I've settled them I'll ride to Fort Bayard an' have a talk with that major. I'm not trustin' Callahan, after him sendin' that deputy after me."

Not waiting for her to reply, he got the gunny sack, instructed her to hold it and filled it with various articles of food from the shelves. He made his selections with deliberation, and there was little left of the meager store when he had finished.

He tied the bag with a short rope which he found on the floor—the rope that had been around Edna's wrists; then he swung the bag under his right arm and carried it outside. Edna followed him, observing with dismay that he staggered a little.

But with her help he got the bag on his

horse and strapped it to the saddle. Then he went in search of Naylor's horse, and led it around, to where Edna stood waiting.

She mounted first, then turned her head and watched him as he swung into the saddle. She saw him wince as he swung up, but once he settled back against the cantle he smiled.

"Now you wouldn't think that a man would need two arms to do his ridin'. But a man gets used to usin' both, an' when one is gone he misses it."

Saying nothing more he urged his horse northward, over the trail which had brought Edna to the cabin the night before. Following him closely, she observed that when he reached the trail leading to Willets he veered northeastward, and when half an hour had passed she became aware that they were riding in the gully where Naylor had roped her. Her horse was not in sight, and she presumed it had strayed.

However, she was not interested in the animal. She kept scanning the surrounding country, dreading the appearance of a horseman. But she saw no signs of a rider, and she was relieved when Nevins led her into a maze of hills and cañons where they could not be seen from the level country they had left.

For another half hour they rode—slowly, for the trail was rough and at times hazardous. Later they began to ascend a rise that led to a plateau. Still they could not be seen from the section of level that had been left behind, and yet at times from between the shoulders of hills and through clefts in the walls of cañons they could see the lower country for many miles.

They came, after a while, to a little level high among some ragged, towering peaks. Southward, shutting from view the lower country from which they had come, was a wall of granite perhaps a hundred feet higher than the level on which they stood. To the right and left of the granite wall ran miniature cañons, corridors with rock walls and roofs, caves.

In front of them, to the north, beginning at the bottom of a slope not more than a dozen feet below them, was a vast, green level. It stretched for several miles to the

hills that rimmed it, northward; east and west it merged into other hills.

Near the center of the level ran a narrow stream of water, white and sparkling in the sun. Near by were trees that spread an inviting shade. Over the level was a brooding calm, a slumberous peace, a pervading atmosphere of aloofness and security.

"Oh!" exclaimed Edna as the two halted their horses and sat motionless, mentally absorbing the beauty of the picture, "isn't it wonderful! How in the world did you happen to discover this place?"

Nevins smiled.

"I reckon I'm the only one that knows about it," he replied. "There's only one way to get here—the way we came. You take any of the other trails and you run plumb into the hills and blank walls that you can't see over. You'd never suspect there was anything on the other side.

"I've never heard of anybody findin' this place. Only one. He was a Swede, named Svenson. He came in here between two days with a flock of sheep. Not many. Maybe twenty-five. He'd followed the Rio Grande down from the Magdalena mountains.

"I happened to be ridin' over to Rignal's that night. There was a good moon, an' I saw Svenson an' his sheep headin' in this direction. I followed him an' saw him drive through the pass we took. After that I came durin' the day an' talked with him. He knew what would happen to him if he ever showed himself on the plains, an' so he stayed here.

"He didn't bother anybody. Until the time he died no one ever knew he was here. He wasn't much of a talker an' I never found out anything about him. But I came here one day an' he was dead. Natural.

"I didn't want his sheep, an' I reckon some of them are still here. Anyway, I'm hopin' they're here."

She detected a note of earnestness in his voice.

"Why do you hope the sheep are still here?" she asked.

"Mutton tallow is one thing that will draw the poison from an infection," he said. "I'm goin' to kill a sheep and get some tallow. You find it near the kidneys.

You render it over a fire and spread it on hot.

"That's what I had in mind when I felt my arm gettin' worse. I was headin' for here when I struck the Rignal shack."

He laughed.

"It's been eight years since Svenson lived here," he went on. "Two or three times a year I ride here to see how things are comin'. I've often thought this would make a dandy place for a man to hole up if the law got after him. But I never suspected that the time would come when I'd have to use it."

Edna repeated what she had told him of the conversation between Naylor and Travis, when he had said: "An' Matt thinkin' he was hangin' Ross Nevins! But anyhow, Matt got Hamlin." Edna added that if he could reach the sheriff he could clear himself.

"Yes," he said, "I've thought of that. It's mighty plain the whole thing was a frame-up, Indians an' all. I'll get to Callahan. But you've got to stay here until I do."

He looked long at her, and it appeared to her that he was having some difficulty in finding her. The light in his eyes had dulled, his face was a ghastly white, and he was holding tightly to the pommel of the saddle.

Apparently, having succeeded in getting her into his vision, he smiled.

"I'll be showin' you the place where you'll have to live until I get back," he said. "It's right over here."

He wheeled his horse and sent it along the edge of the level, westward.

Edna followed him and observed with dismay that he swayed perilously, and that his head kept drooping forward, jerkily, in the manner of a man sitting erect in a chair, napping, and trying to fight off drowsiness.

He rode onward though, until after passing through a narrow passageway hewn from the solid rock, he reached another level.

Here he halted and waved his right arm.

"Svenson's house," he announced.

Amazed, Edna stared.

They were on a circular level, not more than fifty feet in diameter. The rock wall

which on the level they had just left had towered about a hundred feet above them, had sloped downward until it was not more than thirty or forty feet high. But above their heads was a giant overhang that arched out over them like a huge, inverted bowl.

The arch formed a great cave, with smooth, painted walls. Along its edge grew ferns whose long fronds drooped until she could almost touch them. In the rear of the cave, against the smooth wall, was a rock ledge several feet wide and perhaps eight or ten feet above the level upon which their horses stood. Edna rode close to it, and although she rose in the stirrups, she could not see over its edge.

There was a balcony of logs around the edge of the ledge, and a ladder leaning against it. The ladder was light, and Edna felt that it had purposely been made that way to facilitate drawing it upward to the ledge. She was certain that her conclusion was correct when she observed a bunk on the ledge.

That, she felt, was where the man, Svenson, slept during his occupancy of the place. It was safe, secure.

She finished her inspection of the ledge and her attention was attracted to the east wall of the cave, where wood ashes and charred sticks showed where Svenson had built his fires. ~~And she saw that the narrow~~ passageway through which they had entered had a door, or a heavy gate built of slender saplings lashed together with leathery vines, the gate itself swinging from heavy pegs driven into crevices of the wall. There was a heavy bar, and slots into which the bar could be slid.

The passageway formed the only means of entrance or egress. Once in this place, Svenson had no need to worry about wild animals that might be prowling about. And that, Edna now realized, had been her chief concern when Nevins had proposed coming here.

But at this moment Edna's thoughts went to Nevins.

He was unlashng the bag of provisions they had brought from the Rignal cabin, and as she watched him the bag fell to the floor of the cave. Nevins sat, leaning over

a little, gazing down at it. Then he straightened and looked straight at Edna.

"I reckon that's all, Svenson," he said. "Nobody will bother you here—you or your sheep. I'll be headin' back this way after I've killed Travis!"

He wheeled his horse and sent it into the narrow passageway. He vanished, swaying from side to side.

With a cry Edna rode after him, and she was not yet through the passageway when she saw him. His horse had halted on the little level from which they had viewed the valley. The animal was standing motionless, the reins dragging. Close to him, lying on his right side on the smooth stone of the level, was Nevins.

No word or sound issued from Edna's lips. She had anticipated this, for she had divined Nevins's condition. Her face pale, her movements swift and vigorous, she slipped off her horse and went to Nevins. Although she inwardly shrank from the ordeal, she was aware that the man's life was in her keeping and that her modesty must not be permitted to interfere with his chances.

Nevins was unconscious. She knelt beside him and felt his pulse. It was weak, and he was breathing heavily.

She arose and stood for an instant looking down at him, and while she was wondering what she ought to do for him, she was aware that she was also speculating over the physical frailty that had brought him down. A man of his apparent ruggedness should not so quickly succumb to a wound which, although painful, had not touched a vital spot.

She got on her horse and rode back through the passageway to the cave, where

in a corner on a shelf of rock she had seen a wooden pail in which was some water covered with a greenish slime. With the pail dangling from her hand she rode down the slope into the valley until she reached the stream of water she had seen from the first level.

Kneeling on the grassy bank of the stream she scrubbed the inside of the pail with sand and water until it was as clean as she could make it. Then she filled it with the clear, sparkling water of the stream, mounted the horse, and rode back to Nevins.

He had not moved. She opened his mouth and let some water from a cupped hand drip between his lips. Then with another cloth torn from her garments she bathed his head and neck. Once when the water partly revived him he opened his eyes and looked at her as though puzzled.

Resolutely, she unbuttoned his shirt, working it off his arms and down over his shoulders. But before she got the garment off her face had blanched and her eyes had grown wide with dismay.

For the wound in his arm was not the only one he had received. Low down on his left side, just above the hip, was another. He had not spoken about it, through fear of worrying her, she supposed. But this was the wound which had weakened him, and which had finally brought him down.

For the first time since she had set out upon the journey which had taken her to Judge Travis, she was shaken. She got to her feet and stood, facing the emerald valley into which Nevins had brought her. She did not speak, but in her thoughts was a plea, repeated many times:

"God help me to save him!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



YOU CAN'T GET AWAY FROM IT

What? Read the novelette under the above title next week and you will find out. Knowing that the author is

GEORGE J. BRENN

some of you may guess now. In any case it is an absorbingly interesting story



His Weak Spot

By JESSIE HENDERSON

THEY were not sure about Slim Devitt in the precinct. Kitty Baird was not sure about him herself. All she felt sure about was her secret hope that she couldn't be falling in love with a man who had been picked up on suspicion and turned loose for lack of evidence more times than any one else in the whole of Hell's Kitchen.

Nobody seconded Kitty's hope with more fervor than Harry McCall. Upon Devitt's professed reformation McCall turned a glance dark with the suspicion of a law abiding citizen, who sees the girl he adores show interest in the very youth it is his duty to trip. Except when disguised as Santa Claus or his equivalent, most of the men from headquarters have that same ironic pucker of the lids. No one can acquire a reputation as the shrewdest detective on the force without acquiring also this disconcerting look. McCall had acquired both.

Yet if McCall prayed Kitty would come to her senses as much as Kitty prayed so,

there was another who prayed it just as earnestly as McCall. Slim argued it out with himself till the sweat stood on his forehead, till his jaw set at an angle, which usually moved his acquaintances to draw their guns or drop them. And he came at last to the conclusion that a man whom every cop in the precinct would rather get dead to rights than draw an extra week's pay, could not be called a suitable match for a girl like Kitty Blair.

In any swamp you are likely to find little stretches of firm, wholesome ground on which normal vegetation thrives. Even Hell's Kitchen had its islands of respectability, and on one of these Kitty Blair grew up like a wild rose among lagoon weeds.

Not from her drab mother, not from the toil-broken father who she dimly remembered, did Kitty derive her looks. Some glorious great grandmother back in the old country, some colleen who ran around barefoot and had all the fresh milk and fresh air she wanted, bequeathed to Kitty that

milky rose skin, that coronet of flaming hair, those amazing gray-green eyes with the twinkle in them.

Neither the shoddy tenement where her mother shuffled about the household tasks, nor the noise bedeviled factory where she herself worked among the filing cabinets, drove that twinkle from Kitty's eyes. Nothing scared it away till she met Slim Devitt.

Hurrying through Keegan's alley one evening on a short cut home after work, Kitty ran plump into the tail end of what had started out to be a murder. In the garbage-strewn crevice between the high buildings stood a group of young men in poses of unconscious melodrama.

The center of the group was a youth with his foot on a revolver. A boy who tried not to look frightened stood by his side. Opposite the youth loomed a scowling antagonist, whom Kitty recognized as Tiger Costello, the prize fighting pride of the district. Tiger, nursing the fingers of his famous right, turned toward the youth a face divided between rage and conciliation, a face rapidly swelling around one eye.

"What're you gettin' sore about, anyways?" Tiger inquired. "Gimme my gun."

The first words Kitty ever heard from Slim were calculated to fry the garbage where it lay on the alley bricks. "Are you going to give the kid his cut?" Slim finally demanded.

Tiger looked the youth over deliberately. Kitty saw now that Slim held in his left hand the muzzle of a gun, the butt of which had all too clearly descended on Tiger's cheek. Any one born in Hell's Kitchen knows enough about revolvers to realize that a man who holds his by the muzzle instead of by the butt is at a distinct disadvantage. Slim might almost as well have been holding a mere club for his only weapon against five men.

As he stood there, tall and alert, his foot on the other's revolver and a try-and-get-it look on his dark face, something in Kitty's heart stirred. Graceful as a panther, and about as pleasant at the moment, he seemed to be holding the five of them off by sheer nerve. It was, in fact, sheer nerve backed by that reputation on which McCall and the precinct looked askance.

Kitty wondered afterward how a man could have such a clean look and such a black reputation. At that instant, however, what she noticed most were his eyes. They were dark blue—cold and dark as blue steel just then—and the thing that spoke to her from them was the thing she loved most in the world: courage. She hadn't known till that moment how much she loved it.

There was nothing in Kitty's ancestry that bade her keep away from a fight. Instead of backing out of the alley, she stood spellbound, pressed against the brick wall. Some of the men had their hands in their pockets. The fingers of one began to slip inside.

If he drew—

If some one could divert their attention—

"I hope I'm not interrupting," she heard herself say clearly.

Those with their backs to her jumped like startled cats. Slim stared, the blue-steel of his eyes slowly softening.

"But if you'll step aside," Kitty continued, smiling as if the affair were not to be taken seriously, "so I can get past—"

"Here, you! Make room for the lady." That was Slim.

With alacrity they stepped aside. Kitty sailed through their midst, dropping a crisp: "Thanks!"

Behind her she heard Tiger Costello ingratiating of tone. "Sure, I'll give the kid his cut. What're you sore about?"

"O.K. Here's your gun." Slim again. The noise of a revolver kicked across the bricks.

And then some one else. "Her? She's Harry McCall's sweetie."

That made her angry. She wasn't Harry McCall's sweetie. She wasn't anybody's sweetie. She didn't intend to be anybody's sweetie for years and years.

Nevertheless, every time she had seen Slim Devitt since then her heart stood still at the flash from his eyes. Many people's hearts had stood still at a flash from those eyes, but usually not because the flash was the sort which Slim directed toward Kitty.

Formal introductions were not insisted upon in Slim's set. "Hello, cutie," he said to her one day.

Kitty disliked the tone. She elevated her

little snub nose, gave him a freezing stare and walked on.

People didn't treat Slim like that. Certainly girls didn't. Next afternoon he followed her home from the street car.

She saw him leaning against the cigar store doorway, there on the corner, watching for her. He straightened at her approach and wheeled in behind her. In the intervals between the crash of traffic and the shrieking of children at play, she could hear his footsteps, and suddenly she felt very small, like some little fawn, perhaps, that a panther is stalking.

At the entrance to her own house she whirled in a blaze of anger—Kitty didn't have that red hair for nothing.

"What do you want?" she cried, stamping her foot.

"This," said Slim, and tried to kiss her.

She didn't dodge. She put out a hand and merely said: "*Don't*" But the tone and something in her face stopped him like a bullet.

Dumbly he watched her vanish into the shadowed hallway. Girls had protested before, had roughly struggled. But, cripes! She had meant it!

It took him several days to plan a new line of campaign. In the end he could think of nothing better than to approach her as she ran out to the delicatessen and, hat in hand, ask with a humility that would have electrified his friends: "Say, can I speak to you a second?"

This worked better. "Why—yes," answered Kitty, and her face broke into smiles.

Slim put the hat back on his head, sunk his hands in his pockets and stared down at her.

"Yes?" Kitty reminded him.

"I'm sorry if I was fresh the other day," Slim said with difficulty.

"That's all right."

"It was just because I wanted to get acquainted with you."

Kitty sent him a glance a great deal more starry than it should have been, all things considered. "Why?" she asked softly. Instantly the look in his face made her eyes drop and the quick color flood her cheeks.

"Gee," Slim barely breathed, "you're a knockout!"

Naturally, after that they were friends.

She wouldn't let him come to see her every night. Tacitly it was understood between them that the nights Harry McCall came, Kitty wasn't at home to Slim. And she wouldn't let him take her anywhere. The gang was edified to see Slim evening after evening seated on the steps of Kitty's place, just talking or listening, and seeming to enjoy it.

"What d'you see in that stiff, anyway?" Slim asked her on one occasion.

"Harry? He's a very good friend of mine."

"I noticed that." Slim's tone grew sulky.

"Listen, Slim. Harry McCall was in the same regiment with my brother Jack, over in France. When Jack—when Jack got killed, Harry brought me his watch and the picture of me and ma he always carried; and I like to talk to him because we can both talk about Jack. Besides—Harry's nice."

A brief silence fell. "I don't like cops," Slim vouchsafed.

Kitty smiled a little sadly. "Well, they don't like you," she answered.

Slim folded his arms and leaned his dark head against the rickety railing, looking up at the half dozen dim stars above the street lights. "You bet they don't!" he said with satisfaction; "say, there's cops in this precinct, if I have a couple of drinks in me or have my hand in my pocket, they'll walk out on the edge of the sidewalk to keep out of my way." He gave a short laugh. "They'd better!"

The silence lasted so long that finally he darted a quick look at the girl. The wild rose had faded from her cheeks. Very sad, very white, with downcast eyes she sat beside him. There was something terribly aloof in her attitude, almost as if—as if one of them had died.

"What's the matter?" Slim asked.

After a long while she spoke. It seemed that the effort of speech was almost too much for her. "You wouldn't understand."

Slim took her hand, the first time he had held it. In his grasp it was unresisting, icy cold.

"Tell me, dear," he begged.

If she heard the endearment she gave

no sign. "I don't like the gang," she told him, "I don't like rough stuff. If the cops are afraid of you, that's nothing to brag about."

Slim almost dropped her hand in his amazement. What did she consider something to brag about, then? They sat thus in utter silence while for half an hour the thronged street blazed and swirled.

"Is that—" Slim asked at length in a tone so lifeless that Kitty scarcely recognized it—"why you won't ever go out with me any place?"

The girl nodded.

"Because you're scared?"

Kitty shook her head. "Because I'm ashamed," she whispered.

Another long silence, during which Slim's preconceived career and ideals fell apart and then regrouped themselves into new and exotic patterns.

"You mean, if I was to give up this stuff and maybe get a job, it'd make a hit with you?"

"Oh, Slim!" The color flooded back to Kitty's face and her gray-green eyes shone.

"And, listen: If I do, will you—"

Kitty looked for the moment terrified.

"I don't know, Slim. I don't—know."

"Well," said Slim, "I'll take a chance, anyway."

It was at this point that discouragement came from a quarter in which encouragement might have been expected.

"Have you gone crazy, Kitty Blair?"

Harry McCall wanted to know, his fair, boyish face wrinkled with exasperation and hurt. Kitty wondered herself. "Don't you realize that Slim Devitt is the worst gangster in the precinct? Leads his own gang? Has been mixed up in a dozen big jobs where safes were cracked—"

"You never arrested him for it," Kitty retorted.

"He's too clever," McCall admitted; "but every cop in the precinct and every Headquarters man is waiting with his tongue out for a chance to get him. One slip and he's gone. And yet you fall for his line!"

"Harry, he's trying to reform—"

McCall's laugh was an ugly one. It ended in a gulp. "Kitty, you're breaking my heart, girl," he said.

Tears came to her eyes. "I wouldn't hurt you for the whole world, Harry; you know that. Again and again I've been telling you that I didn't know my own mind, and I give you my word I know it less to-day than ever before in my life." She hid her face.

"Has that yegg got such a hold on you as that?" McCall asked between a sneer and a sigh. "Reform! I'll tell you his game. It's one of three things. He's trying to curry favor with you because he's taken a fancy to you—and you're not the first. Or he's trying to cover up some job by acting mealy mouthed. Or he's making out to reform just to get into your good graces and pump you about me. He knows I'm after him, bad luck to him and all his like."

Kitty did not answer.

"I tell you, this reform is only a bluff."

"It's real, Harry."

The big fellow made an almost childlike gesture of despair. "If it's real, ask him to give up his old gang. You'll see then. What's he still runnin' with them for?"

Kitty opened startled eyes. "But he isn't doing any—rough stuff. He isn't in on any of their 'jobs.'"

"Does an honest man mix with that scum?" asked McCall, and flung from the house in a rage.

II.

SHE took his advice that very night.

"Slim, are you still in with the old crowd?"

"Sure. They're all right."

"It's not good for you to be in with them—now. It don't look right. They're a bad lot."

"Say!" Slim was deftly rolling a cigarette with his left hand, not touching the paper with his right at all. Kitty watched the adroit fingers. "D'you think I've got a sponge for a backbone? Just because I meet my old friends now and then doesn't mean I'll go out and crack a safe, does it? Sure they're a bad lot; but they're good guys."

"They didn't look so good that day in the alley. What was happening?"

Slim drew in a puff of smoke, expelled it and laughed. "Oh, that! Why, me and Tiger Costello are great pals, but he got my

goat. There was a kid playing craps with us, and the kid lost about thirty dollars. He was broke. Maybe you know that when a fellow goes broke, the next one that makes a pile is supposed to give him a cut. That is, give him the amount the fellow that makes the pile started in with.

"Well, Tiger went broke, too. And when the time came for somebody to get a cut, Tiger reaches over for the money. I says to let the kid have it that went broke first. Tiger'd had a few drinks, and he won't let the kid have it and he reaches for the money again. So I steps on his hand.

"So then he got sore and pulled a gun. So I had to take that away from him, and I hit him a clip with the butt of mine to kind of sober him up. There wasn't anything to it."

Kitty drew a deep breath.

"What's the matter now?" Slim inquired.

"He might have killed you," she said.

Slim looked down at the cigarette in his fingers. "I wish he had," he murmured.

Impulsively Kitty put a hand on his arm. She felt the muscles beneath the sleeve jump, but Slim patted her hand gently before he put it back in her lap. "Don't do that again," he commanded.

"Why, Slim—"

He faced her, the veins swelling on his forehead.

"Listen, kid, I've thought it all over. Thought it over till I'm about off my head. I—ain't your kind. This reform stuff is the right dope, and I'm going through with it. But you needn't ever be afraid I'll make love to you again, or try to kiss you— It isn't natural that you'd care for a guy like me. I don't blame you. I'm glad you don't." He stopped to smoke furiously. "No, that's a lie. I'd give my hand to have you care for me. But don't! Don't!" After a moment: "If you do, don't ever let me know it."

Abruptly he got up. "Well, I'll be going. Have to get home early these nights, see. I'm still on probation. Gee, that's funny, isn't it? Probation. Well, they never got me for anything big—and never will, now."

Kitty looked up at him whitely. "Probation?" she repeated, half hearing.

"Didn't you know they got me for being lit one night and carrying a gun, about a month ago?" He smiled grimly. "Lot of things you don't know about me, ain't there, kid?" He smiled again, though his lips were gray with the effort. "That's what made me decide the way I did, about—me and you."

She watched him down the street till it swallowed him.

III.

If the stars govern our fate, the stars that night must have held a caucus on the subject of one Slim Devitt. And the caucus must have been as lively a session as ever shook celestial political circles. Wasn't that the evening when unprecedented showers of meteorites fell, and astronomers discovered half a dozen new planets?

Hardly had Slim turned the corner when along the other side of the street he was threading came Tiger Costello, and the gang. Their roar of greeting Slim acknowledged with a wave of his hand, but Tiger hailed him again. "C'mon over, Slim. We're all going to Murphy's place."

"Can't!" Slim called back.

Tiger sounded aggrieved. "Aw, Slim. C'mon. Are you still sore with me?"

Slim crossed the street, with Heaven knows what stars rooting for and against the move. "I'm not sore, Tiger," he said, noting that all the party was edged, but not lit. There is a nice distinction.

Tiger heaved a sigh of genuine relief. "I'm glad!" he said, adding the proper adjectives to express his gladness; "you and me have been pals too long to split over a game of craps."

"Right." Slim whanged him affectionately on the shoulder. "Well, boys—me for home. Probation. Late now."

The gang wailed its indignation. Home? At this hour? When him and Tiger had just made it up? When Murphy had some swell stuff waiting to be opened? No—a thousand times no!

Slim hesitated. He had a genuine liking for Tiger. He didn't want Tiger to think there were any hard feelings left. After all, fifteen minutes more—Not a drink, though. He started with them toward Murphy's.

The stars went into executive session. Round the next corner came Dutch Jones and most of his gang. Between Tiger and Dutch, for divers good causes, there was an enmity which usually meant more than an exchange of salutations whenever the two met. Slim noted with misgiving the fact that the Jones gang exceeded his own by four men; the misgiving, lest you do him an injustice, being not because of the probable affray, but because of what looked like an impending smirch on his probation record.

That first epithet hurled by Dutch would ordinarily have brought the Tiger to Dutch's vicinity on the jump. Slim clutched the Tiger's arm. "What's the use running into trouble?" he argued. "They've got four more men than we have."

Mouths agape, the gang listened to Slim, for the first time in his life, counsel against a mix-up.

"Oh, all right," Tiger assented after a blank moment of astonishment. He linked his arm in Slim's and, followed by taunts from the enemy, they sauntered on their way. The gang followed at their heels, trying to think up new taunts to toss back.

Suddenly on the pavement in front of Tiger landed something more palpable than a taunt. It was a pop bottle which burst into a thousand fragments with a report like a pistol shot. Other pop bottles followed, two of them in quick succession. And after the pop bottles, emboldened by Tiger's steady retreat, came the Dutch Jones gang with more bottles swinging in their hands.

Obviously it was no time to think about what the probation officer might say. Outside Murphy's place some one had providentially set a row of milk bottles, ready to hand. If Tiger happened to be first to seize one, Slim certainly was second. After that, the thing became confused. There were several brief but busy minutes of bedlam, of crashing glass, an occasional wild shot, and a plenitude of reflections, exchanged by both sides at the top of their lungs, on the ancestry of the respective opponents and the immediate intentions of the respective champions.

Slim found himself engaged with a stalwart Jonesite who, as he broke from Slim's

grasp, reached for a hip pocket. There may not have been a gun in the pocket, but Slim did not wait to inquire. He leaped upon the man and by a dexterous twist brought him smashing to the ground, breaking the enemy's arm in the process.

There was no more fight left in that fellow. Slim looked up briskly for the next adversary, only to discover that the battered remnant of the Dutch Jones gang was fleeing around a corner with Tiger Costello in joyous pursuit. The battle was over.

Almost at once Tiger reappeared, walking. Slim ran up to him. "Let's duck," he advised; "the cops 'll be on our necks in a minute."

Hysterical screams from tenement windows gave emphasis to this advice, and the street littered with glass from curb to curb underscored it. From far away came the thin, clear shriek of a police whistle.

"Slim!" Tiger gasped.

Slim saw now that Tiger held both hands to his side, and even as he noticed this he caught the ooze of blood between Costello's fingers.

"Quick, boys!" Slim shouted, "Tiger's hurt!" He tried to hold the other, who staggered back against a lamp-post and slid to the ground.

"He got me," Tiger whispered as the rest came up.

"Look after him," Slim commanded, "while I telephone for an ambulance. I'll be back—"

"Telephone and then beat it," advised Shorty Dimick, "there's no need for you to get in wrong with the probationer. We can do everything there is to do. Beat it."

For a moment Slim hesitated. The shriek of the police whistle came steadily nearer. People were pouring from tenement houses and running toward the lamp-post beneath which Tiger lay huddled. "Beat it, you fool!" "Get out while the gettin's good!" The gang clamored at him.

"All right," Slim consented. After all, he could do nothing more. He ran around to the side door of Murphy's place, gained entrance by the simple expedient of kicking the door in, found the telephone in the

dark beside the door, called an ambulance, and let himself out on the sidewalk again.

From beyond the corner of the street which he had just left came a swelling murmur. In the distance he could pick out the clang of a patrol wagon. At any moment some of the bystanders might run over to Murphy's on the same impulse which had brought Slim there, and so discover him; or a policeman might come pounding up this side street. Retreat in the direction of his own home was cut off by the crowd itself.

At the sound of hurrying footsteps Slim's indecision vanished. He dodged into the alley beside Murphy's, ran two or three blocks without a definite goal, and found himself not far from Kitty's.

It occurred to him that for a few hours her tenement would be a good place to hide. If need be, she could help him furnish an alibi. He dropped over the back fence of her yard, entered the house by the cellar, and made his way up the back stairs. Even inside the building, a couple of blocks away from the scene of the fight, the hullabaloo of its aftermath was audible. Tiger and Dutch had surely pulled a good skirmish this time.

As Slim crept along the faintly lighted hallway in the direction of Kitty's door, he was dismayed to see that door suddenly flung open and a man's figure emerge. Even from the back he recognized Harry McCall. Kitty followed him across the threshold.

"No—don't come," Harry told her peremptorily; "keep in the house, and keep safe. It's probably a gang fight—and if your fine young reformer isn't mixed up in it, I'll eat my shield."

He plunged down the stairs. At the same instant Kitty turned and caught sight of Slim. Her mouth fell open, but she did not betray him by so much as an exclamation. While the thunder of McCall's departure still rose to them, she silently crooked a finger at Slim and swung open the tenement door.

Disheveled, a cut over his eye, the sweat of battle and of flight still on his face, Slim made a rather terrifying appearance. Kitty put a hand to her throat.

"So you were in it?" she asked.

"I couldn't help it, Kitty—leastways, not after the thing got started." He explained briefly. "So Tiger's hurt bad, and it's a mess all around. I thought maybe if I had to do it I could frame some kind of an alibi here; but McCall spoiled that. I can't hardly claim I was callin' on you when he knows different."

Kitty spoke as in a dream. "He came back. We had a sort of fuss earlier to-day. He wanted to make up."

"Oh, well—" Slim fell silent. Now that he was here, he didn't like to ask if he could stay a while. Sort of a dirty deal, after all, for the girl, in case the police did any questioning. He put his hand on the doorknob. "I guess I'll be going."

Kitty sprang for the door so suddenly that he blinked. "What? Go out there while Harry is looking for you? Stay here, Slim; stay till the excitement's died out and you can get home safe. If Harry comes back, you can hide."

Slim looked down at his feet. "I didn't know as you'd want me to stay here—" he said in a hoarse voice.

For answer, Kitty put her two hands on his breast, raised her wild rose face and kissed his twitching lips. For a moment he resisted her, pushing the clinging little hands away. But they rose again and went around his neck. With a groan he gathered Kitty into his arms, strained her to him, whispered broken words against her face.

"I knew," said Kitty, "when I saw you standing there in the hall, looking like a ghost, and in some kind of trouble—whatever kind it might be—I knew then that I loved you."

Something wet smeared her face. She drew back in Slim's arms to look up at him. The tears were streaming down his cheeks. That, at any rate, was a sight no one had ever seen before.

IV.

It was two hours or so later when Slim made his way through back streets to his own quarters. Nobody stopped him. Cautious reconnoitering showed that no one was watching the house. Thankfully he stole to his room and fell into bed.

To Slim it seemed that he had slept but

a few minutes, though it was over an hour, when somebody shook him awake. Dazzled by a flashlight, he looked up into the face of Harry McCall.

"Come on," said Harry, "and make it snappy."

"What's up?" Slim demanded.

"Tiger Costello," McCall growled, "he kicked off at midnight."

Slim went white. "Is Tiger dead?"

McCall gave him a look not easily forgotten. "You ought to know," the detective answered. "You're wanted for his murder."

At the station they put Slim through a third degree to which the ordinary third degree was by comparison as a safety match to a forest fire. It lasted till almost noon. Exultant as they were at getting Slim Devitt on a serious charge, his questioners had to acknowledge that the man's nerve seemed unbreakable. He made no important admission during all the long hours.

"Not that it makes so much difference whether you confess or not," McCall sneered, "we know you had trouble with Tiger over a card game. We know you faked a reconciliation last night. We know you ran up and stabbed him while pretending to ask a question."

"It's a lie," Slim repeated monotonously, sunk in his chair, cheeks hollow, eyes closing in an agony of fatigue.

"Tiger's own words," McCall iterated, "'He got me. He got me.'"

"I didn't do it," Slim said for the millionth time. His chin sank on his chest. Even in the brief interval between that and the next question he had gone to sleep.

The next question came, also for the millionth time. "Where did you go after the fight?"

"Home," Slim repeated.

McCall drew his colleagues aside. There was a whispered conference. Sunk in a stupor of weariness, Slim did not hear McCall say: "He will break then. Leave him to me."

It was the opening of the door that jerked Slim into wakefulness. What new deviltry were they planning? Why didn't they lock him up in a cell and let him sleep? Slowly the door swung inward.

With a little cry on her lips, Kitty ran toward him.

In spite of that deadly weariness, Slim sprang from his chair and had his hand over her mouth before she could say a word. Her eyes were dilated with horror, her face white as paper. He could feel her shaking as she clung to his arm.

"Don't say anything," Slim warned tensely, "you don't know anything about this—" he looked meaningfully into her staring eyes—"and if you did, it would only get me in worse if you told." God! what if they brought her into it? "You don't know anything about it," he repeated, gripping her arm till his nails bit her flesh.

"No, Slim," Kitty replied obediently, "I don't know—anything—about it."

With a relieved sigh, Slim let her go. "They can hear everything we say," he informed the girl, "so we won't say a great deal."

"Why, Slim's nobody's listening. Harry himself let me in to see you—"

"The dirty dog!" Slim said between his teeth.

"No, no. It isn't any trick! Harry wouldn't—"

"Harry would," Slim retorted, "Harry would do anything to get me, and there's several reasons why I hope he hears me saying this. I hope—" He checked the anger surging within him. Why waste energy on anger? "Remember, kid, you don't know anything—not anything at all—about this thing."

"All I know," Kitty answered, "is that you didn't do it."

"Are you as sure as you sound?" Slim groaned, crushing her in his arms.

"What does it matter?" Kitty said, her cheek to his. "It would kill me if you'd done it, but I'd love you, anyway."

Slim said hungrily: "Would you, kid? Would you, even if I'd done it?"

Something in the thought, in his gaze, made Kitty close her eyes, but she panted: "I'd love you, no matter what—" Her arms strained as if they would never let him go.

Into this tableau walked McCall. Across Kitty's bent and sobbing figure, still in his embrace, Slim gave the detective a long

look of defiance before, half delirious with the ordeal, with triumph and with despair, he bent and kissed her on the mouth. McCall's black scowl was a reward in itself. Slim Devitt had done many a daring thing in his time, but none which for reckless challenge could touch that kiss.

When Kitty, head up and smiling—only the piteous eyes betrayed the depth of her anxiety—had left the room, Slim leaned against the table, folded his arms, and waited.

"If only to save a decent girl like Kitty from a crook like you," McCall said, his voice shaking with passion, "I'll send you to the chair, if it's the last act of my life."

"I'll die grinning," replied Slim, "at the thought that she picked a square crook instead of a crooked cop."

By a tremendous effort McCall regained his self-control and his professional manner. "You haven't a chance, Devitt. You may as well come clean."

"Clean?" Slim laughed. "That's a funny word in your mouth." He laughed once more. "And they call you 'the square cop'! Well, I always said there ain't no such animal."

He waited for McCall to speak. Then: "If you think by sending me to the chair that you'll make a hit with Kitty—"

"Drop it!" McCall's voice was a whip-lash; "leave Kitty out of this."

"Who brought her into it?" Devitt retorted.

The shaft told. McCall's face went ghastly as his prisoner's. It was plain that his heartbreak equaled Devitt's. "We got to do a lot of things in this job we don't want to do," he said slowly. "I'm only doing what I have to."

"Don't make me laugh," Slim answered.

Once more McCall flashed into anger. "Go on and laugh. Laugh good and hard. It's about the last laugh you'll ever have, you yellow—"

During the avalanche of stinging abuse, Slim stood nervously rolling in his left hand a bit of paper. Every nerve in him cried out for a cigarette. He had never been patient under a tongue-lashing. This thing was getting under his skin—

Of a sudden, as if he were weary of the whole business, McCall's voice faltered and stopped. After a few moments he pulled open a table drawer, took out a ruler, and handed it to Devitt.

"Stab me with it," he commanded, "the same way you stabbed Tiger Costello."

"I didn't," Slim replied. Was it to begin all over again?

"Well, stab me the way you think some other fellow did it," McCall insisted. And when Slim, trying to puzzle out this new maneuver hesitated, the detective added: "Unless you're scared of giving yourself away."

He had found Devitt's weak spot; the inability to take a dare. None too gently, Devitt stabbed the detective for the next two minutes, trying to cut his heart out with the blunt wooden edge of the ruler, and wishing to heaven it were in reality a knife. He stabbed with the ruler now in this hand, now in that; from in front, from the side, from the back.

"All right," McCall grunted at last.

Sneering, the other threw down the ruler. "Satisfied?"

"Perfectly," McCall answered.

He gave Slim a long stare of concentrated hate and, Slim gave back the stare, unwinking, putting into it all the venom of his soul. McCall's eyes were the first to waver. He turned toward the door, groping a little for the knob.

Flippantly, but with a heart dead within him—"Run along," Slim jeered, "and tell your story."

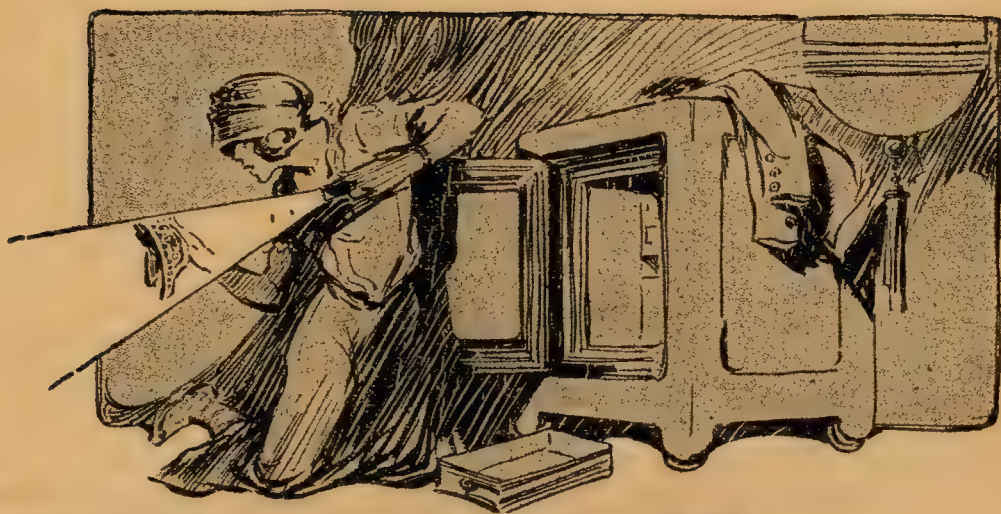
"I will," McCall replied.

With more interest than he showed, Slim put another question. "What've you cooked up to tell 'em now?"

"To turn you loose," said McCall.

In response to the white astonishment on the other's face he added: "No left-handed man held the knife that killed Tiger Costello."

"Why, damn you—" Slim began hoarsely. The detective's figure blurred and Slim found to his own abysmal disgust that tears were in his eyes. "Why, McCall—" he began again—"My God, I never thought I'd have to apologize to a cop!"



The Under Dogs

By **HULBERT FOOTNER**

Author of "Mrs. Storey's Cases," "Officer!" etc.

CHAPTER XXIII—(Continued).

THE BURGLARY.

MR. STERRY came out into the sitting room and switched off the lights. He offered to close the door of his wife's room, but she had changed her mind about that.

"It makes you seem too far away," she said.

Her husband went into his bedroom for the last time, leaving the door open behind him.

Jessie settled herself for a long wait. According to the schedule she had laid down for herself, they were to have half an hour to get into bed, and a whole hour to settle themselves to sleep, before she got busy. She hoped that they might both be snorers; it would be so reassuring. Mrs. Sterry's highly nervous state did not promise well for Jessie.

They occasionally spoke to each other

back and forth across the sitting room. Mr. Sterry's voice took on a sleepy quality. Finally he did indeed begin to snore. But his wife woke him up.

"Walbridge! Walbridge."

"Hum! Ha!—What is it, my dear?"

"Please don't go to sleep until I do."

He gave a short, exasperated laugh.

"Well, let me know as soon as you've gone, my dear."

Very soon he began to snore again. His wife did not wake him up, but Jessie could hear her tossing on her bed, and uttering little complaining noises. At length these sounds, too, were stilled.

Jessie sat listening, listening. Through the open windows came the deep night hum of the city which is never stilled. Occasionally a particular sound separated itself from the hum, such as the rumble of an elevated train from Third Avenue, or the purr of a rapidly moving automobile. Then Jessie heard some one softly whistling

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in the street below. This would be the gray clad watchman. The sound resolved itself out of nothing as he slowly approached the house, and faded into nothing again as he went on. Jessie could even distinguish the air, it was *Traumerei*. These musical souls turn up in the oddest places. So much the better, she thought; if he has a tender heart he will not be able to resist Bella.

Every now and then Jessie cast the light of her tiny flash on the dial of her watch. And each time she thought her watch must have stopped. It was the longest hour of her life.

Meanwhile she debated how to solve the problem of the two guards below. Assuming that there are two men playing cards in the cloak room, what must I do? I must make a noise somehow that will draw them out. I must manage to make a noise at a little distance from myself, so that when they run out of the room, I can slip in. She thought of Mrs. Sterry's workbox on the center table. A spool of thread!

Quarter of an hour before the time she had appointed with me, Jessie decided to start. As she snaked her body across the floor of the sitting room, her heart pressed up suffocatingly into her throat. So this is what it feels like to be a thief, she thought. Hereafter, I will always remember it, when I catch one.

How thankful she was then, for her long practice with the combination of the safe! When her fingers met the knob, they knew by instinct what to do. She turned it forward, then back, listening for the slight sounds from inside that she had learned to know. Through the open door on her right came the comfortable sounds of Mr. Sterry's snoring; through the door on the left—nothing. Was Mrs. Sterry lying there with wide open eyes, listening? The mental picture caused Jessie's hand to tremble.

At last the tumblers of the combination fell into place, and Jessie grasped the handle of the lock. She turned it with the most exquisite care, the grate of steel on steel makes so significant a sound. Just as she was about to pull the door of the safe to her, Mrs. Sterry spoke.

Jessie's heart seemed to turn over in her

breast. She clamped down the screws of self-control. For she had to turn that handle back to its normal position with equal care, before she dared leave it. One of them might come out and switch on the lights. Jessie slipped back to her hiding place behind the screen, where she sat, sternly forcing her trembling body under control.

She heard Mrs. Sterry's voice again, and realized from the quality of it that the woman was asleep. In the sudden reaction that followed upon her relief, she trembled more violently than ever, and was forced to stretch herself out on the floor, clenching her teeth, before she could regain command of herself. Yet, throughout her terrors, Jessie, true to her nature, was watching herself from the outside with a sort of amusement. Well, she thought, for pure excitement, there is nothing like committing a robbery. But I can do with less.

She returned to the safe, and pulling open the door, inserted her little key in the drawer, and pulled that out with infinite care. The tiara was contained in a little baize bag, drawn tight with a tape. Through the sleazy material, Jessie could feel the sharp points. There were also one or two flat cases in the drawer, presumably containing other jewels; but Jessie, notwithstanding Black Kate's behest, let them be. The tiara would serve her purpose sufficiently.

Keeping her hands under iron control, Jessie closed the drawer and locked it; closed the door of the safe, and turned the handle. Finally she gave the knob of the combination a twirl to set it. There only remained to search Mrs. Sterry's workbox on the table. Jessie chose the coarsest thread, judging from the size of the spool, and made for the door. She took whole minutes to turn the handle of that door—a door handle is treacherous—and to release it, when she was outside. When her hand dropped from it, she breathed a sigh of relief. That much was over.

She went softly down the first flight of stairs, and halfway down the second. There she sat down to consider her further moves. She still had ten or fifteen minutes before it was time to leave the house. From where she sat she could see across the wide foyer,

the light streaming out through the open door of the cloak room; and occasionally a murmured word in a man's voice reached her, as one of the players scored in the game.

Her first thought had been to conceal herself in the other cloak room, but the door was closed, and it would be too risky to attempt opening it, immediately opposite the door of the room where the men were. They were trained thief-takers, she supposed, with eyes and ears on the alert. So she looked around for some other hiding place in the foyer, but there was none in that empty place. If any alarm was raised, the first act of the men naturally would be to flood it with light. Jessie determined to act from the service corridor behind the cloak room.

She had first to dispose of the tiara. There was but one possible place for that; shoved down inside the top of her stocking, the curve of the ornament to her leg. The folded up bag went with it.

Jessie then retraced her steps to the main floor of the house, where she unscrewed a bulb from one of the side lights about the walls. One bulb was not heavy enough for her purpose, so she collected three, and tied them together with thread. She hung this cluster on a thread over the top of the door that led to the service stairway, making sure that there was space enough for the thread to pass freely back and forth when the door was closed. She then descended the stairway, paying out the thread from the spool as she went. There was a little well in the middle of the stairway, down through which the thread might pass without having to turn any corners.

Across the little central hall in the basement, and back through the narrow corridor toward the service entrance she went, paying out her thread, and continually pausing to make sure that it was still running freely. Her principal anxiety was lest she might not have enough thread; but she remembered with satisfaction that most spools are marked "50 yards," and this was a full spool. She arrived outside the door to the cloak room with plenty to spare.

Wrapping the end of the thread around her forefinger, she cast a light upon her

watch. It was then three fifteen, that is to say, the exact moment that she had told me to get busy in the street outside. She gave me five minutes, seven minutes, to do my job. Meanwhile, with her ear to the crack of the door, she listened to the slap of the cards on the table, and the murmurs of the two men as they scored their points.

When the proper moment arrived, she gave the thread a tug, and it broke. Instantly she had the satisfaction of hearing a sound like an explosion within the depths of the house.

The two men in the cloakroom leaped up, knocking their chairs over backwards, and ran out. Jessie instantly opened the door. The little wall cupboard was almost within reach of her hand. She pulled open the door, and jerked down the handle of the switch that controlled the burglar alarm. A second later she was back in the service corridor with the door closed behind her.

She reached for the street door. This was the door by which she and Alfred had entered the house, you remember. Bolt and spring lock, she had it all fixed in her mind. Between the door and the iron gate she paused for a second, peering between the bars for the watchman. But I had done my part, and he was not there. She ventured out with a horrible sinking feeling. Suppose Mr. or Mrs. Sterry stuck a head out of the window. She would have to trust to her heels then. However, no alarm was raised. She walked sedately to Madison Avenue. As she turned the corner she looked back. Still no alarm. The furious beating of her heart quieted down.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MUTINY.

YOU can imagine the little comedy when Jessie came into the drugstore.

There was I, sitting on a chair in a state of semi-collapse, with the druggist offering me something in a glass, and the gray coated watchman looking on solicitously. I drank what was offered me—I suppose I was taking a considerable chance, and immediately said I felt better. The watchman, suddenly recollecting his job, ex-

pressed a hasty wish for my recovery, and beat it out of the shop. The druggist offered to send for an ambulance, but I insisted I was quite well again.

He then went to wait on Jessie, who asked for headache tablets, a very natural request at that time of night. Jessie expressed her sympathy for me, and we all got into talk. The druggist asked me where I lived. I gave an address near by, and Jessie volunteered to see me to my door. So we walked out of the shop together. How simple!

Jessie whispered: "Is it all right about Rumsey?"

"He's on the job," said I.

"Good! Then I can go ahead."

"Have you got the tiara?" I asked trembling.

"In my stocking," she said dryly.

"Anything more for me to do?" I asked.

"No," she said. "We'll take the Broadway subway down, and you can drop off at Twenty-Third."

As we turned the corner into Fifty-Ninth Street we came face to face with Black Kate, who was evidently waiting there for us. She gave me a poisonous glance. Here was a pretty how-de-do!

"What's she doing here?" she demanded.

Now, my mistress, faced by a sudden and unexpected situation, will always tell the truth: "She's been helping me," she said coolly. "If she hadn't taken the watchman out of the way, I wouldn't be here myself."

"Why didn't you ask me for assistance?" said Black Kate.

"I've heard others ask you," said Jessie.

Black Kate was in a fix. Devoured by rage, she was afraid to exhibit it before a stranger. She didn't know how much I knew.

"What does she expect to get out of it?" she snarled.

"That's between me and her," said Jessie.

"Well, come on home," said Black Kate.

In the dark part of the block, under the wall of the Savoy Hotel, a dingy, inconspicuous car was waiting by the curb. Black Kate opened the door. "Get in," she said to Jessie.

Jessie hesitated. As she explained to me afterward, she didn't know Charley, the chauffeur; she had no influence over him. She suspected they might stop the car some place, and the two of them take the tiara from her forcibly, and thus destroy all her work.

"Get in," Jessie said to me.

"She can't come with us," said Black Kate blustering.

"Unless she comes, I don't," said Jessie.

There was a brief pause. Then Black Kate changed her tune. I suppose it suddenly occurred to her that this was the best way out of her difficulty after all. "Get in! Get in, both of you," she said with a hideous smile, which suggested to me that if she had her way, I wouldn't ever get out of that house once I got in. I knew far too much to suit Black Kate.

So we all got in and the car started.

"Let me see the tiara," said Black Kate.

"I will when we get home," said Jessie.

"You give it to me now!"

Jessie made no answer to that. Black Kate started to curse her, then threw me a sidelong look, and fell silent. Finally she asked in a strangled voice:

"What's the big idea?"

"They say that bit of jewelry's worth near half a million," said Jessie coolly. "I ain't a goin' to hand it over till I'm satisfied what I get out of it."

Black Kate started to laugh. It had a truly horrible sound. "All right," she said. "We'll settle all that when we get home."

I need not say how terrified I was by this unexpected turn of events. My whole body was damp with a cold sweat. But it was not so bad though, as one of those terrible situations where you have to make up your mind what to do. I had my orders, and there was no choice but to obey.

Nothing more was said. We rolled rapidly through the streets, and in about ten minutes pulled up at the curb in a dark block of old-fashioned houses. The house before which we stopped was vacant, and advertised for sale. At one side was a narrow, arched opening leading through to the rear, and of course I recognized the place as the masked entrance to the house on Varick Street.

We three women got out, and entered the narrow passage. I heard the car drive on. We crossed the narrow court behind the front dwelling, and paused while Black Kate opened the door of the rear tenement with a key.

I whispered to my mistress: "I am not much disguised. Remember, two of the men of the gang know me."

"They were outside men," she answered. "They do not come to the house."

There were two rooms in this little tenement. Black Kate forced us to wait in the first while she manipulated the secret door within. But her carelessness in revealing the entrance from the street was additional evidence of her determination never to allow me to leave the house again. I shivered. I had confidence in my mistress, but just the same it is staggering even to learn that somebody desires your death.

She held the door or panel, or whatever it was, back for us to pass through. It was too dark for me to see how it was contrived. I heard it slide shut behind us. We passed through the second little house, across the flagged yard, and down four steps into a dark room that I knew must be the kitchen where so much had happened. As we entered, some one lit a flaring gas jet, and I beheld a meager, ill-favored youth with sandy hair, who could be no other than Skinny Sam.

His eyes opened wide at the sight of me. Black Kate whispered something to him, and he quickly lowered his eyes. Black Kate led the way out of the kitchen; Jessie followed; I was behind Jessie; and Sam last. The narrow hall outside the kitchen was dark. I was half aware of a door being opened beside me; then I was seized and violently thrust through it. An instinct, quicker than a lightning flash, warned me that there were stairs on the other side of that door. I made a wild pass for the stair rail, and just succeeded in saving myself. Heavens! what a narrow escape! It turned me a little sick. The door was slammed shut, and a bolt shot.

My impulse was to fling myself against the door, and shout, but I restrained it, for fear of spoiling my mistress's game. She knew where I was and she would take her

own measures. It was a hideous moment. Listening with my ear pressed to the crack of the door, I heard a scuffle outside. I heard Black Kate's voice, low and excited: "Hold her arms! Hold her arms! It's in her stocking!"

Then I heard my mistress's voice raised high: "Bill! Bill!"

That gave me my cue. I added my shouts to hers.

I had the unspeakable relief of hearing a heavy body come half tumbling down through the house. As it rounded the stairs a growling voice demanded:

"What the hell's the matter here?"

"Canada Annie," replied my mistress, panting. "They threw her down cellar."

"That woman is a spy!" said Black Kate stridently. "She knows all about our affairs. It's a matter of life and death to us!"

"She's no more a spy than I am!" said my mistress indignantly. "She helped me to-night. You wouldn't protect me."

"You had no business to ring in an outsider!" cried Kate.

Bill said, to Sam I suppose: "Get out of the way!" The bolt was shot back, and the door opened.

"You'll pay dear for this, you fool!" cried Kate to Bill, half beside herself.

"Well, anyhow," he growled, "she don't go down cellar till there's been a proper inquiry."

We all went upstairs in a confused manner. Bill had Jessie by the arm, and I pressed close behind them. We went into the room over the kitchen, and somebody lit the gas. A cheerless untidy room, with a dining table covered with a hideously dirty red cloth. The light revealed Bill enveloped in a voluminous bathrobe, his hair standing on end, a figure at once comic and terrible. Black Kate's face was livid with rage. Other men came running downstairs in various states of undress. I recognized them all from my mistress's descriptions; the big lout Fingy Sile; Pap, the decayed ex-convict; the neat little Abell; and finally the terrier-like figure of Tim Helder.

All wanted to know what was the matter.

"Matter enough!" cried Black Kate. "Jessie has let this stranger in on the se-

crets of the organization. "What am I goin' to do with her? Let her go so she can tell what she knows? I leave it to you, men."

Old habit was strong with them. The thought of the "organization" had entered into their very souls. All scowled at me and muttered—even Bill.

Jessie saw that her influence over them was slipping. "You all know me," she cried. "I will answer for this girl as for myself!"

But Tim Helder shook his head. "You took too much on yourself, my girl," he said.

"I say to the cellar, with her," said Black Kate. "We can't afford to take any chances."

"You're right!" cried Sam loudly.

The others seemed half inclined to agree. If I had been a man, I expect I would have received short shrift at their hands. But in the eyes of all of them, except Sam, I could perceive a certain reluctance to hurt a woman.

"Who's goin' to do it?" muttered Fingy Silo.

"I will," said Black Kate, with a gloating look at me that made my blood run cold.

Fingy turned away with a shrug.

My mistress was not at all dismayed. "She helped me bring in half a million to-night," she said coolly. "Is that nothing? I say test her out, and if she makes good, take her in with us."

"That's not for you to say!" cried Black Kate furiously.

"No harm in givin' her a show," growled Bill.

"No!" cried Tim Helder. "The more women, the more trouble!"

"You all know the orders," cried Black Kate. "Strike instantly at anything that threatens the organization. That's how it's always been preserved."

"Put it up to the boss," said Jessie.

Black Kate's expression changed. Staring hard at Jessie, she pulled down the corners of her mouth in a derisive and hateful smile. "I've no objection to doing that," she said. "I'll call him up first thing in the morning.

"You ain't helpin' your friend none by that," said Bill uneasily to Jessie. "The boss, he picks his people wherever he has a mind to. He ain't goin' to stand to have one shoved down his throat."

"I'll take my chance of that," said Jessie, boldly bluffing. "When he hears who she is and what she's done, he'll be glad to get her."

Several of the men smiled rather pityingly at Jessie.

"Get back to your bed," said Black Kate.

There was no great haste to obey her.

"Whaddya mean, brought in half a million?" Bill Combs asked of Jessie with strong curiosity.

By way of answer, Jessie retired into a corner of the room, and turned her back on them.

"Get out!" cried Black Kate furiously, trying to shepherd them with her arms. "You all know you got no concern with each other's jobs."

But Jessie already had it out. She whipped around, holding the tiara aloft on her two hands. "Look, boys, look! The Russian Crown jewels!"

Black Kate made a vicious snatch at it, but Jessie coolly held it out of her reach. Kate collided with Bill, who thrust her indifferently to one side. "No harm to take a look," he growled.

Meanwhile Jessie was crying: "Look! Look! Look!" and exhibiting the treasure all around.

The glittering bauble in Jessie's hands cast a spell on everybody in the room. All else was forgotten. Even I forgot my perilous situation when I looked at it. How can I describe it? It was as if dozens of parti-colored little suns were rising out of Jessie's hands. The thing had a truly infernal beauty. But it was not its beauty which cast the spell. The hearts of those rough men were hard to beauty. It was the spell of immeasurable riches which lighted the shine of cupidity in their eyes, and caused their lips to part, and their breath to come quickly. Gleaming black pearls as big as sparrows' eggs; flashing diamonds; rubies like dragon's eyes, and the cold fire of enormous emeralds, greener than the sea.

Broken, awe-struck exclamations came from their lips.

"My God; look at that!"

"I never seen the like of that before."

"Nor will you ever see its like again!"

"God, Jess, you're a wizard!"

"Put it in your hair, Jess! Nobody's got a better right!"

Jessie put it in her hair, and turned herself about, smiling at them gaily. From across the room Black Kate and Sam watched the scene with bitter faces.

Jessie cunningly sought to work up the men's cupidity. "The paper said it was worth half a million," she said. "And they said Walbridge Sterry got it at a bargain, because there wasn't half a dozen men in the world with the money to put into such a thing. Taken down and sold separately it would bring half as much again. That in the middle's the biggest emerald in the world."

"Let me have it in my hands for once, Fuzzy-Wuz," begged Fingy.

"And me. And me!" from the others.

"Sure," said Jessie, "I regard every one of us as having a share in it."

It was passed around from hand to hand.

"When you're ready to hand it over—" said Black Kate from between tight lips.

Jessie took it back into her own hands. "Half a million at the least," she said to the men. "And I brought it in, with the help of Annie there. It's my job. And I guess it's a big job, even for this big organization."

"You're dead right!" somebody said.

"Well," said Jessie meaningly. "Are we going to divide or stick? It's up to you, boys! Shall I hand it over to her?"

"No!" cried Abell and Fingy simultaneously. And "No! No!" Bill and Tim came in with a moment later. Pap said nothing, but at least he ranged himself on their side of the room.

"What does this mean?" demanded Kate, white to the lips.

"It means we're going to stick together hereafter," said Jessie.

"Are you going to hand over that stuff or ain't yeh?"

"I'm willing to hand it over on certain conditions."

"Yes; just a few reasonable conditions," said Tim Helder.

"A conspiracy, eh?" cried Kate. "I said this girl was dangerous. You, Bill, this is where your craze for her peroxide hair has landed you. Anybody could see you're dippy about her. You're too old for love, Bill, your wits is softened."

"That may be," said Bill undisturbed. "But I'm on'y one."

"She's got you all locoed!" cried Kate furiously. "All of you's ready to let her twist you round her pinky. My God! what a set of fools you are, standin' there! You Tim, and you Bill, at least you are old enough in the organization to know what will happen. What's this emerald crown to the boss? Less than nothing at all. But the organization is everything. It's not the first time you have seen some fool operative try to make trouble among the others. What happens, eh? What happens?"

"Same old line of talk!" interrupted Jessie. "And all designed to split us up."

Black Kate essayed to laugh. "Suppose there are a half a dozen of you in this? What do you count against the whole power of the organization?"

"We count this much," said Jessie. "All these dozens of other operatives are just scouts and runners-up for us. We're the principals of the show. And if the boss steps on us, his business stops, see? If it breaks it will be his doing, not ours. We're strong for the organization. We on'y ask to be treated like human beings."

All the men signified their approval.

As the discussion went on, Black Kate cooled off. From the first day she had hated Jessie with all the power of her soul, and up to this time Jessie had always succeeded in putting her in the wrong. Now Black Kate felt that her feeling was justified; Jessie was giving her a handle to use against her, and the older woman had a sweet foretaste of triumph.

"Well, what are your conditions?" asked Kate.

"A fair division of the stuff," said Jessie. "So much to the one that brings it in, and so much to a general fund for all of us."

"How you going to secure those conditions?" asked Black Kate with a sneer.

"This is a business organization, isn't it?" said Jessie. "You're always telling me so. It ought to be run on business principles then. We want a contract with the organization."

Black Kate laughed outright; nevertheless Jessie's word was cunningly chosen. "Contract" was a slogan, a rallying cry. Every one of the men took it up.

"We want a contract. We want to know what we can expect!"

One by one Kate tried to detach them. "It's no use talkin' to you, Bill; you're cracked about the girl. But you, Tim, I never saw a skirt come around you before. For your own good, I ask you to keep out of this. Let them run their heads into a noose if they want."

"I want a contract," said Tim obstinately.

Kate turned to the next, who was Fingy. "You're a young man," she said, "with your future before you. What you want to queer it like this for? This girl's got nothing for you. When there's mutiny in the air like this, that's the time for a young fellow to get on by sticking to the organization."

"Nothin' doin'," said Fingy.

"You, Abell," she went on to the next; "the boss was talkin' to me about you a couple of days ago. 'Abell's done well,' says he 'he's entitled to a vacation.'"

"You're lying!" said Abell contemptuously.

"And you, Pap," said Kate with a curling lip, "what you want, a contract for cooking? You ain't entitled to any percentages nohow. There's nothing in this for you. You must have set your heart on dying behind the bars!"

Pap, livid and sweating with terror, was incapable of answering her. However, he made no move to desert his associates. They gathered close around him to give him courage.

Kate shrugged. "Well, I done my best to keep you from committin' suicide," she said. "You're bent on it. All right. I'll call up the boss. I guess this is important enough to wake him out of his sleep." She

paused at the door of the room, and turned. "If any one of you wants to save himself from the general clean-up, let him speak now. It's your last chance."

There was complete silence in the room.

With a laugh, Kate went on out.

Sam was still in the room, and the others gathered in a close group in the corner by one of the windows. The feelings of solidarity and defiance had roused all the men to a pleasant state of excitement. Jessie worked among them to stimulate it, and keep them up to the mark.

Kate returned to the room, smiling still. "He's coming right over," she said. "He'll be here inside ten minutes."

A significant silence fell on Jessie's followers. She was aware of a shiver of apprehension passing through them. On the other hand Kate and Sam were gleeful. It was nothing to Jessie. She had gained her point. A great satisfaction filled her.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BIG BOSS.

THE atmosphere of the dining room in the house on Varick Street was tense.

The five men were gone from the room for a few minutes to dress themselves. Jessie had handed the tiara over to them to keep. When they returned the two parties in the household waited, and watched each other from opposite sides of the room. I must say that the morale of the larger party, that is Jessie's party, suffered most under the strain of waiting. Only two of the men, Bill Combs and Tim Helder had ever seen the Boss, and the others seemed to be filled with a sort of superstitious terror at the thought of being brought face to face with this mythical personage. This was of small moment to Jessie; however she kept up a decent pretense of trying to hearten them. Observing that little Abell's face was growing whiter, and his lips more tense, she said:

"After all, he's only a man like yourself."

"Sure," said Abell with a boyish swagger. "I'm not afraid of him!" But it rang hollow.

The little whispering group in our corner became quieter and quieter. Big Bill frequently wiped his face. Even that human oak tree was nervous; it was clear, though, that we could have depended on this one to the death, had we need of him. The glance that he bent on my mistress was slavish in its devotion.

Black Kate and Sam, who, you may be sure, missed not the slightest change of complexion in our party, grew correspondingly more sure of themselves. Yet Kate was a little worried, too, by my mistress's unconcerned air. It was clear from her expression that she suspected Jessie might have a trick up her sleeve.

He did not come in ten minutes, nor in twenty. Very likely he purposely delayed his coming to heighten the effect.

Then we lost Pap. Suddenly the poor wretch with a groan went staggering over to Kate, spreading his hands out. He could not speak at first. A revolting figure of broken humanity. One turned one's head away from the sight. An animal-like growl of rage broke from Bill and Fingy.

Sam gave a loud brutal laugh. He could be very brave against poor Pap. "Get back!" he cried. "We don't want you, old general debility!"

Pap found his voice. "I ain't took no sides," he quavered. "I ain't said a word one way or the other. I don't want no trouble with nobody. I'm neutral."

"There's no neutrals in the organization," said Black Kate.

Pap's voice scaled up. "I ain't said a word! Not a word!"

"You didn't speak when you had the chance," said Kate. "Get back to your friends."

Pap turned around. All our men, of course, were scowling ferociously. The pitiful old wretch with a face of despair, staggered toward the door. Fingy made a move in his direction, but Jessie laid a hand on his arm. We heard Pap stumble down the stairs.

Sam looked at Kate inquiringly.

"He can't get out," she said coolly. "He don't know the trick of the sliding door."

A general discussion arose as to what should be done with me. All the men on

our side thought that I ought to be kept out of sight at least until the major question was decided. They thought I would confuse the issue. Black Kate affected to believe that there was no place where I could be safely confined, except down cellar. Jessie refused to allow me to be put down cellar. So I stayed where I was. On our side Jessie's word was law.

The suspense became unendurable. During the last few minutes nobody said a word. We were all concentrated on the business of controlling our shaking nerves. Only my wonderful mistress maintained her air of unconcern. She lighted a cigarette. That simple act administered a jolt to Black Kate's assurance.

When the front door bell sounded through the house, one could almost have sworn that one heard the beating of the hearts in that room. Black Kate was very pale when she went out. Nobody else changed his position. My mistress dropped her cigarette on the floor and trod out the light.

Black Kate reëntered the room. Our eyes were fixed on the door in mingled curiosity and terror. There was nobody behind her. There was a pause long enough for our heartstrings to squeeze up in apprehension. Then a masked man entered the room.

The mask was no more than a narrow black strip across the upper part of his face. A mere stage trick, but most infernally effective. It brought mystery into the room with him. I could hear the strong men in front of me catch their breaths in terror. Little Tim Helder took off his hat; a significant gesture in him. Something went out of the backbones of all those men. Had we been depending on them, we would have been lost. I stole a look in my mistress's face. Outwardly it expressed a blank, but I could see that she was smiling inside. A woman of iron!

As for the rest, the man who came in was tall and heavily built; a middle-aged man one would suppose from his girth, though his black hair was still unstreaked by gray. He wore his hat throughout, and kept turning a thick black cigar between his teeth. The lower part of his face expressed a coarse strength, but the mask dominated all. Apart from that mask, and ordinary

gross figure, one of thousands in the streets of New York. But the mask dehumanized him, and rendered him a figure of terror. I was teased by something familiar in his aspect, but my wits were too confused to track it down.

He instantly spotted me. Two blue sparks shot out at me from the apertures in the mask.

"Who is that woman?" he demanded.

His voice was extraordinary. It was completely divested of all human tone whatsoever. It was like a voice issuing out of a void. Another stage trick perhaps, but it added enormously to the man's impressiveness. My knees shook under me. Yet I had a sense of having heard that voice before.

Black Kate answered him. The imperious woman was humble enough before him.

"Her name is supposed to be Canada Annie Watkin," she said. "Jessie Seipp used her to-night without my knowledge as a sort of lookout on the Sterry job. As long as she'd been let into the secret, I thought I better bring her down here and ask instructions."

He said nothing. He had the impassiveness of a Chinese idol. From one man to another his glance turned, the blue sparks shooting through the holes in the mask. It was curious, though you could see his eyes were blue, and though the whole of his lower face was exposed, you could not figure to yourself what the man looked like. It is the area immediately surrounding the eyes that gives a face its character.

Black Kate asked humbly: "What must I do with Canada Annie?"

"Orders will be given you," said the impassive voice.

So much for me.

I saw the gray, decayed figure of Pap hanging about just outside the door. Curiosity was stronger than fear. He had to come back. An outcast from both factions, he awaited the outcome tremblingly.

The man turned the icy blue points of his eyes on my mistress's face. He met his match there. She adopted a dull, stupid look, and held his gaze unflinchingly. It was a sort of duel. I think he must have been surprised. The secret of his power was

that he wasted no words. Any ordinary man would have made some blustering speech such as: "What's the matter here?" or "What do you want, girl?" He merely looked. He let the others talk. They all fidgeted. Black Kate could not keep her mouth shut.

"That's her!" she burst out. "She's the cause of all the trouble. From the moment she entered the house! Trying to vamp the men and all. Setting them fighting. And now this conspiracy. The Russian jewels have turned her head. Wants to make terms before she hands them over. She thinks she can tell us where to get off, the young fool!"

Bill Combs interrupted her. "You can't get the truth about a young girl from her, boss! You know her. She hates a woman who's younger and better looking than herself."

"Let me tell you about this vamping business. A lot of us men cooped up here in this house, and a fresh and handsome girl coming among us; of course, it made trouble. That weren't *her* fault. It was the men made the trouble not the girl. She's been on the square with all of us. Ask them! Ask them! What's biting Kate is, *her* man tried to—"

Here Black Kate began to shriek accusations in the effort to drown him out. Others joined in, and a furious wrangle resulted. It was a weird scene. All that noise, and the two principals, the only two who mattered, facing each other, composed and silent. Finally the man held up his hand, and they all fell silent as if the wind had suddenly been let out of them.

"I'm not interested," he said in his remote voice. "Only in the work." He addressed Jessie. "Did you carry out your orders to-night?"

"Yes."

"Where's the stuff?"

One of the men had the tiara. Which one I did not know.

"Before I hand it over, I got something to say," said Jessie in the heavy, dogged style she had adopted.

Without changing his voice in the least, he said: "I do not discuss terms with you. I issue orders. If the orders are not

obeyed—" He concluded with a forcible gesture.

"Just the same I'm going to say my say," said Jessie doggedly. "We ask to be treated as human beings, that's all, and for a fair division of the profits."

He coolly ignored her. "Where's the stuff?" he repeated, turning to the men.

Fingy Silo's eyes bolted, betraying him as the possessor of the loot.

"Hand it over," said the masked man.

Fingy drew back in a horrid state of indecision.

"If you give it to him we're done," warned Jessie.

"Hand it over," repeated the masked man in his quiet, awful voice.

"What's the matter with you all?" cried Jessie. "Will you let him bluff you? Are you full-grown men, and taken in by a bit of hocus-pocus like this? There are four of you. Tear the mask off his face. You'll only find a man like yourselves behind it. A fat man, too soft to put up a good fight!"

A slow smile wreathed the thick lips of the masked man. He stood before them perfectly motionless, the two blue sparks shooting out of the holes in his mask. He gave them plenty of time to act on Jessie's suggestion. But the four cringed before him abjectly.

"Then I'll show you!" cried Jessie, making a move forward.

One could hear the gasp of horror that escaped them. Bill Combs flung his arms around Jessie.

"No, no, my girl!" he muttered aghast. "No, no!"

"Hand over the stuff!" the masked man said to Fingy. It was evident that he sneered.

And Fingy, hanging his head, placed the tiara in his hands. It had been returned to its little green baize bag. The masked man looked inside to make sure that the contents were intact, and pulled it shut again without betraying the least concern.

"It's no use," Fingy muttered shamefacedly to Jessie. "You can't stand out against him."

Bill released Jessie. She tapped a fresh cigarette on the back of her hand, while

the men looked at her, astonished at her effrontery. She was just as well pleased, of course, not to have the scene prolonged.

"It's nothing to me," she said, "if you enjoy being hocused."

And so the great conspiracy petered out.

The masked man turned to leave the room without another word. It was extraordinary what a capacity he had for keeping his mouth shut.

"What am I to do now?" Kate cried helplessly.

He paused. "Go back to your beds," he said as if faintly surprised. "Nothing is changed. The orders will be issued as usual and if they are not obeyed the penalty is the same. If anybody still thinks he can buck the organization, let him try, that's all."

"What will I do with the girl?" asked Black Kate.

He hesitated just for the twinkling of an eye. I suppose it occurred to him what a wonderful servant Jessie would make if he could but bend her will to his.

Bill Combs spoke up. "Boss," he said. "I've learned my lesson. And I'm prepared to serve the organization faithful if you'll let me— Boss, this girl, she didn't mean no harm. She's new here. She didn't know what she was doing. She's learned her lesson now if you'll overlook it."

In view of Jessie's open defiance this was rather ridiculous. But one couldn't help but feel for the big fellow whose devotion blinded him to the truth.

"Boss, she's one in a thousand for our work," he stumbled on. And—and—" He glanced around. "A-ah! I don't care what you all think—I can't let any harm come to her. And if you're too many for me, if she goes, well, I got to go, too."

My heart warmed toward that great brute of a man, whose heart was so deeply stirred.

The masked man said in his detached voice: "For the present the girl is placed in the custody of Bill Combs. She is not to be allowed to leave the house."

"Thanks, boss, thanks," said Bill humbly. "I will answer for her."

Observe how cunningly the man evaded his dilemma. If he had pronounced Jessie's doom on the spot, Bill would certainly have

run amuck. There is not the least doubt but that he would have had Jessie removed from the house next day.

He left the room in an impressive silence. None of the men dared move. One could see through the meretricious means by which he held them subject, nevertheless, I for one, was not strong enough to stand out against him. Kate, key in hand, hurried after to let him out. He did not linger in the hall for any whispered consultation with her. That would have destroyed the awful inscrutability with which he surrounded himself. We heard her let him out, close the door after him and turn the key.

Waiting for the expected dénouement, my heart beat with great slow thumps like a hammer in my breast.

Black Kate started back for the dining room. Before she reached the door, we heard a scramble on the front steps of the house, a pounding on the door, and the boss's voice with all the inscrutability gone out of it, just a plain terrified voice: "Open! Open!" But immediately came the unmistakable sounds of his being dragged down the steps.

Kate with a gasp, darted into the front room to look out of the window. She instantly came running back to us. Her face was blanched to the color of ashes. In the dining room door she stumbled and sank to her knees, clutching her breast and sobbing horribly for breath. Bad heart.

"The police—" she gasped. "They've taken him!"

There was an instant's silence in the room, then utter confusion. Black Kate got to her feet and leaned against the wall.

"It was her—it was her!" she gasped, pointing at my mistress.

My mistress seized my wrist and backed with me to the fireplace. From the bosom of her dress she whipped out the little gun that Bill had given her. I didn't know then if she had ever had the opportunity to load it. I know now that it was loaded.

It seemed to me as if they were all milling around the room like trapped rats. The only one I can remember clearly is Bill Combs. Bill turned a face on us black and terrible with rage and raised his clenched fists above his head.

"By God, girl, I was on the square with you!" he cried hoarsely. "I was ready to go to my death with you. And this is what I get for it. You're nothing but a spy! You've sold us out! Well, damn you, I'll kill you before they take me!"

"Easy, Bill!" said my mistress, keeping her eyes fixed unwaveringly on his. "It's true I had him taken, and I want her," pointing to Black Kate. "The rest of you are free. The back way is open. Beat it."

It is doubtful if they got it the first time.

"Beat it!" she cried, raising her voice. "I am still your friend. I promised you that I would set you free to-night. And if in the future you need a friend, come to me. I will help you to a fair start."

At this moment we heard a peremptory knocking on the front door. They turned and scuttled down the basement stairs.

"Sam! Don't leave me!" cried Black Kate.

He turned, snarling. "To hell with you, old woman!" and disappeared.

Still racked with pain, Kate attempted to follow.

My mistress covered her with the gun. "Not you," she said sternly. "A bullet if you move!"

Black Kate sank, groaning, on a chair. Bill Combs still lingered, goggling with amazement.

"Who are you?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Rosika Storey," said my mistress.

"Oh, my God!" stammered Bill. "And I thought—I thought— Now I see it!"

A strange cry broke from Black Kate.

"Beat it! Beat it!" said my mistress urgently to Bill. "I cannot save you after they are in."

He turned and ran down the stairs with remarkable celerity for his size. I heard other steps on the stairs, and an uncouth figure appeared in the doorway. I recognized Melanie Soupert, gaunt, disheveled, weak from her imprisonment. The steel bracelet still dangled on her sore wrist, but the chain had been cut off short. She looked like a figure risen from the grave; but her sunken eyes glowed with something of the old spirit.

"What is it?" she asked breathlessly.

"I couldn't stay up there like a trapped rat."

"It's all right," said my mistress, holding out a hand to her. "Our friends are at the door!"

Melanie did not notice me at first. She half collapsed within my mistress's embrace.

"Oh, Jess! Oh, Jess! Oh, Jess!" she murmured.

Black Kate looked on at this speechlessly. The woman was half out of her senses with pain. She looked like a wounded wild animal.

Meanwhile the knocking on the door was redoubled. The door key still hung from Kate's nerveless hand. I took it and ran out. I opened the front door, and Inspector Rumsey and four men came tumbling in. I pointed silently to the dining room door. I followed them in.

For a second the inspector looked blankly at my mistress, then his face lighted up. "It's you!" he cried in great relief. "Is everything all right?"

"Right as rain!" she said, smiling. She looked down affectionately at the dark head on her shoulder. "This is Melanie Soupert. I have her safe."

The inspector snatched off his cap.

"By God, *madame*," he cried heartily, "you're the greatest woman of your time!"

Melanie quickly raised her head and, looking in my mistress's face with something like alarm, tried to withdraw herself from her embrace.

"Who are you?" she whispered.

I was just behind her. "Melanie, don't you remember me?" I asked.

She turned her head. Her big dark eyes widened. "Bella!" she said in amazement. "*Bella Brickley!*" She looked back at my mistress with eyes bigger than ever. "Then you must be—" She stammered. "You must be—"

"Your friend," whispered my mistress.

"That is Mme. Rosika Storey, the master mind of us all!" cried Inspector Rumsey magniloquently.

Melanie tried in earnest then to detach herself from my mistress's supporting arm. "You mustn't—you mustn't!" she whispered. "Not the likes of me."

Mme. Storey clung to her, smiling, and Melanie subsided.

"You did it all for me?" she whispered.

"Did you think I was going to let you go?" asked my mistress.

Melanie began to weep out of sheer weakness and relief and gratitude.

To the inspector Mme. Storey said, pointing to Black Kate: "That is your prisoner. She appears to be ill. You had better have medical assistance for her. But watch her well."

"Never fear, *madame*," said the inspector grimly.

"You have the other one?"

"Safe outside, *madame*. He's handcuffed."

"Did you search him?"

By way of answer, the inspector handed over the little green baize bag which had passed through so many hands that evening. My mistress made sure that its contents were intact.

"Bring him in for a moment," she said.

How different was the second entrance of that man! The superboss, the man of mystery, had been brought low indeed. He had been unmasked, of course; one of his eyes was beginning to purple and his lip was cut. Yet he still showed traces of his power. He kept his head up doggedly, and he preserved his remarkable faculty for keeping his mouth shut.

I recognized him now, and a great loud "Oh!" of astonishment was forced from my breast. It was John McDaniels, the head of the famous detective agency which had acquired such a name among the rich for the recovery of stolen valuables! Of course! Of course! Now I began to see it all. As the inner workings of the scheme revealed themselves to me I was all agog with amazement. The detective agency was equally a part of the organization, of course. One department of the business robbed the rich, and another department recovered their jewels—if the reward was sufficient. Furthermore, the outlawed part of the organization aided convicts to break prison, while the reputable part instantly "ran them down" if their master was displeased with them. How simple, how ingenious, how efficient!

My mistress showed no surprise at the sight of him. I learned later that she had recognized him upon his first appearance.

"Mme. Storey wants to have a look at you," said Inspector Rumsey as he led him in.

He never batted an eye. Not a muscle of his face changed. He met her gaze point-blank with complete effrontery. Oh, truly, a remarkable man!

"I'm not going to indulge in any moral reflections, McDaniels," said my mistress; "it's not my line. I only feel like saying when I look at this poor girl, that I regard this as the best night's work of my whole life."

He kept his mouth shut and continued to stare at her with the hardihood of a savage animal.

"Have you nothing to say for yourself?" cried the inspector roughly.

McDaniels cast a look of ineffable contempt upon him. There was old bad feeling between these two.

"Not to you," he said.

"He does right to keep his mouth shut," said Mme. Storey. "What is there for him to say? Take him out."

He was led away. Two men were told off to guard the house until daylight. Then the inspector turned to us.

"Well, ladies," said he, "I guess the night's work is finished."

"What say, Melanie," said my mistress, smiling, "shall we beat it out of here?"

"I ain't got no hat," murmured Melanie, abashed.

We laughed.

"Well, it's past four," said Mme. Storey. "They'll think we've been on a party."

"Where you goin' to take me?" murmured Melanie.

"There's a little flat on Gramercy Park that's been waiting for you for weeks past. If you'll take in Bella and me until breakfast time, we'll all have a chance to tidy up."

Melanie smiled like an abashed school-boy.

If I live to be ninety I will not forget the starry look that appeared in the eyes of the girl as she came out on the stoop of the house and, lifting her face to the

sky, breathed deep of the delicious morning air; for it was growing light. It was worth all we had been through, oh, a hundred times over!

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

AT half past ten next morning Mme. Storey was seated at her desk, and I at mine, and all the lurid events of the preceding days had taken on the semblance of a dream. We were reading the letters that had come in during my absence from the office. They were of no great importance, since my mistress was supposed to be in Europe.

The door between the two rooms was open, and we were talking idly back and forth. Heavens! how sweet was the feeling of perfect relaxation, after having been keyed up so long; how delightful was the free exercise of one's own personality, after having been forced to play an alien part! How I loved the calm and the coolness of our beautiful rooms! When I first came in, I had gone about like a fool, stroking everything.

Melanie was still asleep upstairs. As soon as we had put her to bed Mme. Storey had carried me up to her own place where she had put the services of her expert maid and masseuse at my disposal. In an hour I felt like a new woman. Neither of us had any desire to sleep; it was too good just to be; and we had issued forth in search of the most luxurious breakfast in New York. My mistress looked perfectly radiant. In honor of the occasion she had put on a sports dress of some rare Eastern silk, with a gay all-over design of little dancing men. She had dyed Jessie Seipp's crass locks to darkest brown, the color of her own hair, while waiting for it to grow out, and had subdued the frizzled bush with a net. She looked like a lady again. A lady! She looked like a duchess!

We found our breakfast at Antoine's *recherché* little place on Park Avenue. Need I say how we enjoyed it? You must take a plunge into the underworld to appreciate to the full the delights of fine

napery and silver, of delicate food. A table by a window, with a rose or two upon it—an awning to mitigate the brightness of the morning sun; it was like heaven. And now we were back at Gramercy Park waiting for Melanie to wake up. Melanie and Mme. Storey were much of a size, and Grace, Mme. Storey's invaluable maid, had brought down an outfit from her mistress's wardrobe for Melanie.

The door from the hall opened, and a lady and gentleman came into my office. I closed the door into Mme. Storey's room. I was surprised, for of course we expected no visitors of importance; and these were people of importance, one could see in a glance from their clothes and from their assured manner. The lady was a beauty, though no longer in her first youth. All their breeding and assurance could not conceal the fact that both were very much excited.

"Is Mme. Storey here?" the gentleman asked.

"May I ask the nature of your business?" I said politely.

"I cannot tell that to any one but her," he said. "I am Walbridge Sterry."

As soon as he spoke I recognized them, for of course their photographs have been published.

"Mme. Storey will be glad to see you," I said.

Opening the door again, I announced them. I followed them in. Mme. Storey arose with a smile. We both supposed they had gone to the police and had been referred by them to us.

Mr. Sterry said with an air of great relief: "How fortunate we are to find you! We just came on a chance. Nobody is in town now."

Mme. Storey and I exchanged a glance. So they had not been to the police! They did not know that we had the tiara. What a piquant situation was developing.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I am supposed to be in Paris," said Mme. Storey dryly.

"Indeed! I must have missed the announcement of your departure," Mr. Sterry said politely. "I shall not waste time in explanation," he went on. "I do not know

if you happen to be aware of it—the newspapers have gossiped about it—but I purchased the Pavloff tiara from Prince Yevrienev."

"I have read it," said Mme. Storey.

"Well, it's been stolen," he said, flinging down his hands.

"Stolen!" echoed his wife.

"Ah!" said Mme. Storey, who could not resist drawing them on just a little. "The recovery of stolen goods is hardly in my line."

"I know! I know!" cried Mr. Sterry. "But surely this is an exceptional case. They say that you can perform miracles. In the first place, I want a little disinterested and intelligent advice. I have not been to the police yet—you know the police! Should I go to them and have a great hue and cry raised in the press—or should I keep our loss a secret, and conduct a private search?"

"We think it was stolen by a woman," Mrs. Sterry chimed in. "It appears that last night my husband's valet brought a strange girl into the house to sup with the other servants. He says she left early; but we found, upon questioning him, that he did not actually see her out of the door. The natural assumption is that she concealed herself in the house until later."

"She must have had confederates, though," put in Mr. Sterry, "for she possessed the combination to the safe. A curious feature is that there were other jewels of value in the safe which she never touched."

"Only fancy!" said Mrs. Sterry, with a shudder. "She must have been hidden in the room when we came in."

With a peculiar smile, Mme. Storey pulled open a drawer of her desk. How she loves a dramatic moment like this! She took out the little green baize bag and laid it on top. When Mr. and Mrs. Sterry saw it, their eyes almost leaped out of their heads. When Mme. Storey opened the bag and took out the gleaming crown of little suns, soft cries of astonishment broke from them.

"Is this it?" asked my mistress, with an offhand air.

"Yes! Yes!" they cried breathlessly.

"Oh, what a blessed relief!" sighed Mrs. Sterry, handling her precious tiara. "I have almost come to hate it! It is such a responsibility."

"I quite hate it," said her husband bluntly. "But what are we going to do? We can't sell the thing— This is a veritable miracle," he went on, with a wondering glance at my mistress. "How did it come into your hands?"

"It was recovered at four o'clock this morning from the person of John McDaniels, whom I was watching in respect to other matters."

Husband and wife exchanged an odd look.

"McDaniels?" said the former. "You don't mean the well-known detective?"

"None other," said my mistress.

"Well," said Mr. Sterry, "this grows queerer and queerer. My wife and I have already been to McDaniels's office, and we found it closed."

"Yes," said Mme. Storey dryly. "It would be."

"He enjoyed a considerable reputation among people we know for his success in recovering stolen valuables," said Mr. Sterry.

"Naturally he could get them back, since it was he who had stolen them," said Mme. Storey.

"Incredible!"

"What about the girl who entered our house?" asked Mrs. Sterry.

"I can't tell you anything about her," said my mistress coolly. "One of McDaniels's many tools, I suppose. I content myself with breaking up the traffic."

"And may we take it away with us now?" asked Mrs. Sterry eagerly.

"Certainly. If you will give me a receipt to hand to the police."

The conversation became general then, and Mr. Sterry led the way around gracefully to the question of Mme. Storey's fee.

"Not a cent!" she said, when she saw what he would be after.

He insisted. He would not take no for an answer.

"I could not rest easy under such an obligation," he said.

"Well," said Mme. Storey in her large way, "what is it worth to you?"

"Say, twenty thousand?"

"Too much. Halve it, and send a check to my friend Katherine Couteau Cloke for her work in the prisons. That's the worthiest cause I know."

"It shall be done," he said. "But it should come as from you."

"No," she said firmly, "you don't owe me a cent in this case, my dear sir."

As the Sterrys were leaving, Mme. Storey said casually: "By the way, have you discharged the valet?"

"Not yet," said Mr. Sterry, "but of course I shall."

"But, consider," said Mme. Storey. "This woman, whoever she may have been, was evidently a high-class thief and a past mistress of the art of fascination. How can you blame a simple youth for yielding to the blandishments of such a one? If he is a satisfactory servant in other respects, I'd think it over. This will have taught him a lesson."

"Very well, I will think it over," said Mr. Sterry.

"That was the least I could do for poor Alfred," said my mistress, smiling, when the door closed.

Soon afterward Melanie came downstairs. The girl looked lovely. To be sure, she was still thin and hollow-eyed as a result of her horrible imprisonment, but a touch of make-up in Grace's skillful hands had done wonders—that and happiness. Mme. Storey's pretty clothes became her wonderfully. As I have remarked before, Melanie had an instinct for nice things and knew how to wear them. She was still shy with us, and said very little, but her eyes were eloquent.

"We're going to have lunch up at my place," said Mme. Storey. "Let's go."

It had previously been agreed between my mistress and I that it would be impracticable to bring about a meeting between Melanie and George at the office, since George must know that that was Mme. Storey's address.

"I've got an errand uptown," I said. "I'll join you later."

Mme. Storey and Melanie went off in

one taxicab, and I in another. I had myself driven to the little stationery store on Columbus Avenue. I had a good deal of trouble identifying myself to the worthy Mrs. Harvest. She did not care much for the change in my appearance.

"Is George here?" I asked.

"No," she said, "but I think I can get hold of him. Come back in half an hour."

I think he was there all the time, and that this was just a regular formula she had adopted. However, I had myself driven around the park, and returned later as she requested. I found the handsome, blond George in the little rear sitting room. He opened his eyes at the sight of me.

"What's the big idea?" he said.

"Well," said I, "I just got tired of looking like a frump, a has-been, a school-ma'am from the back counties. A friend of mine showed me how to fix myself up. How do you like it?"

"It's all right," he said without enthusiasm. For George there was but one woman in the world. Well, my feelings were not hurt.

"What the news?" he asked with a painful eagerness.

"Nothing special," I said. "I had a bit o' luck, and I want to blow a good-looking fellow to lunch, that's all."

"I ain't exactly advertising myself in public," he objected.

"That's all right," said I. "I know a quiet little place."

"Well, if you want it," he said, "I certainly owe it to you."

We drove down to East Sixty-Second Street. There was nothing grand about the exterior of Mme. Storey's charming little house that would intimidate George, but he pointed out that this was obviously no restaurant.

"I never said anything about a restaurant," I replied uncandidly. "This is my friend's house."

In the quaint and unusual interior his instinct recognized something rare and fine. He scowled suspiciously, but manlike, hated to betray any reluctance before a woman. He followed me upstairs to the amusing 1850 living room that looks toward the little garden in the rear. Mme. Storey was wait-

ing there. Melanie had been spirited out of sight.

"Do you recognize your friend Jessie Seipp?" asked my mistress, holding out her hand with a smile.

"No!" he said bluntly. "But—but—Yes, I do! What does it mean? What is the game?"

"The game is over. I am Rosika Storey, and this is Bella Brickley, my secretary."

A trapped look came into his face. His wary glance flashed around the room, calculating the chances of escape.

"We don't want you," said Mme. Storey. "John McDaniels and Kate Pullen were our marks. They are behind the bars."

"And Melanie? Melanie?" he cried, wild with anxiety.

"Look behind you," she said.

Melanie was in the doorway. I have already told you how beautiful the girl was when her ordinarily hard expression was softened. She looked now like another Rosalind, boyish and tender.

George looked at her as if he beheld her in a dream, a world of wistfulness in his eyes. He was afraid to put his dream to the test. "Melanie—Melanie," he whispered in a kind of terror.

She smiled enchantingly.

They approached each other slowly. He was hushed with emotion. "Melanie—is it really all right?" he whispered.

Mme. Storey and I could stand no more. We were already at the door. "Lunch is in the room underneath this," she called back over her shoulder. "Come down when you like."

Black Kate died of heart disease while awaiting trial. I doubt if there was a soul on earth to lament her passing. We never did learn precisely what she had made Melanie suffer during her imprisonment. The very recollection of that time was a torment to the girl, and we avoided any reference to it.

In the cellar of that ugly little house on Varick Street two human skeletons were discovered buried in the earth. These murders, for murders they certainly were, could not be proved against John McDaniels, but he was convicted on a score of counts, and

received in the aggregate sentences far exceeding the years he can expect on earth. Nor is he ever likely to receive a pardon. "The blackest criminal ever tried in our courts," the district attorney termed him, nor was the description overdrawn.

The only thing I regretted was the escape of Skinny Sam. When I voiced my regret, Mme. Storey said, smiling soberly:

"But, Bella, I couldn't single out Sam from among the other inmates just because he was a horrible little wretch, and I despised him. I was faced by a difficult moral problem, my dear. Strictly speaking, I ought to have handed them all over to the State, but I had appealed to their friendliness, and if after that I had betrayed them, I could never have looked myself in the face. The only possible distinction I could make was between slaves and slave-drivers. I caught the drivers, and gave the slaves a chance."

Poor old Pap was found wandering the streets in a half-crazed condition a day or two after, and was returned to Sing Sing to serve out an old sentence. Mme. Storey subsequently exerted her influence to secure

a pardon for him. She has supported him ever since in a suitable home.

We never saw Bill Combs again. I suspect he was too much of a man ever to come to a woman, cap in hand. Nor did we ever hear of Fingy Silo or Tim Helder. Presumably, all three of them succeeded in keeping out of jail, or we should have known of it. Some time later Sam was arrested for robbing a woman under peculiarly atrocious circumstances—just what you might expect. It went hard with him, for he had an old sentence to serve in addition. We did not feel obliged to interfere in this case. He had had his chance.

Abell did come to see us—in fact, under another name he is working for Mme. Storey at this moment. She has never had cause to regret giving him a chance. He is one of the best men we have. We were the means of bringing about a reunion between him and his beloved family, one of the most touching scenes I ever beheld. George Mullen is making a place as a master electrician, and Melanie is raising a family.

As for myself, I count Abell, George and Melanie among my best friends.

THE END



TO YOU

GOD took a tear from a flower's heart—
Dipped it in clouds of blue;
Sparkled it with fire, and then let it dart
Into the eyes of You.

God took the breath of a mother's prayer—
The saddest, yet sweetest He knew;
Blessed it and let it melt soft and fair
Into the smile of You.

God took the fragrance of a dream—
'Round it faint echoes blew;
Tuned it to carols, and then let it stream
Into the voice of You.

God took of His heavens a rainbowed part—
Breathed on it starlight and dew;
Made it, with love and blood from His heart,
A spirit of life—that was You!

Margery Land Mason.



A Count of Some Account

By OLIN LYMAN

CROWS cawed in a calm blue sky. The Blackwater Mills thrummed on. Out on the velvety green plaza which faced the road William Elder went pushing a lawn mower round and round and round.

Toward William Elder sauntered Calvin Bly, the superintendent. Cal wore an "iron hat," a red flannel undershirt and a worried look. As he halted opposite Elder, that cynical and ancient oracle leaned a withered elbow upon the mower handle and stroked a gray goatee.

Pushing back his battered derby from a bald brow, "Calomel" Bly, as some enemy had once re-christened him, addressed the pensioner of aciduous wisdom that had, through a long and philosophical life, failed of reward in minted coin of the realm.

"William, this new sheriff's posolutely bugs on the bootleggers. Led his deputies in firin' into a auto on the Promontory

Road last night. Trouble was they stopped the wrong car. City Judge up to Kahuah-go gave the sheriff a Dutch blessin' in open court this mornin', Lem' Stover says. Lem' got run in last night up to the city for carryin' a snootful of 'white mule,' but the judge suspended sentence."

"Eyuh?"

"Eyuh. Lem' just went back to work. Never again, he says. Told me he only took three snifters of the stuff, with some guy, and then naturally kind o' just blew up inside. Cops got him later addressin' a crowd from the city hall steps about the League o' Nations. Lem' admits now he's scared o' the stuff, 'cause in his right mind he don't know what the League o' Nations is."

"Eyuh?"

"Eyuh. Now, William, here's what's worryin' me. Lem' heard from another gent'

in the lockup last night that this Sheriff Vardaman's meditating searchin' these mills. You know it's bein' told around that all the bootleggin' in Polk County centers around Blackwater. Lem's talk's got me worryin' about Pete Slavvery."

"Eyuh?" William Elder's bearded chin pushed out confidentially across the lawn mower handle. Solemn, mysterious, weird, was the expression of his bearded face, like that worn by a patriarchal goat.

"Eyuh!" Calomel stared at William and wagged his head. Never, in his moments of mental darkness about this and that, did William fail obliquely to point him toward some sort of light.

William's cackling voice sank to a confidential murmur:

"Cal, if that fool sheriff gets after Pete he's due to find out somethin'!"

Cryptic always were William's utterances. It would have been hard for Cal to explain specifically just how, when and where they helped, but afterward he always felt that they did. He went away toward the mills, vaguely comforted. While, on the green plaza which faced the road to town, William Elder resumed pushing the lawn mower round and round and round, under the smiling midsummer sun.

Past the heaping cones of spruce pulp wood, cut in short lengths, walked Calomel Bly and over the narrow railed bridge into the finishing room where a row of pert young girls counted the layers of "flat" news sheets all day long. Cal paused at the head of the long table. There sat the prettiest, the pertest, the peppiest of the lot. She was Mattie Briscoe, the head counter. Speed, precision and dependability had speedily placed her at the top of the table, at a dollar fifty more wages per week than her mates earned. She wore reddish freckles, the hue of her bobbed hair, and possessed a positive enthusiasm for life.

"Well, Mattie," inquired Bly, pausing at her chair, "what's the happy word?"

"Grand Rapids consignment packaged in the shipping room," she told him blithely, her slender fingers never pausing in their lightning flippings of the sheets. "This rush New York order under way, Mollie Hem-

inway's off with the measles. Liza Waite's given a week's notice; goin' t' be married."

"Run in an extra girl to supply for Mollie and hire her regular to replace Liza, if she's any good."

"I have. She is. That's her, down at the end, the new cross-eyed one. But she's fast. I don't pick dead ones."

Bly walked on toward the machine room. He wished he had one foreman in the Blackwater plant that was as reliable as this slip of a girl of eighteen years. Jenny-on-the-spot; that was Mattie Briscoe, daughter of the cleverest wood pulp mill boss the mills had ever had. Briscoe and his wife had been killed in an omnibus accident two years previously; their only child had left school and gallantly gone to work. She lived alone in the tiny cottage that her father had nearly paid for. It was among a cluster that formed the village of Blackwater and which the paper making company had erected. She was avowedly a bachelor maid. Swains aplenty came courting, but she said them nay.

No sooner had Bly left the finishing room than one of these rejected ones came bothering anew. In fact, Pete Slavvery had been repeatedly rejected. He was the grinding room boss, the successor to Mattie's father. At first sight of Mattie, Pete had been fearfully smitten, which was all the good it had done him.

Pete wallowed into the finishing room. He was a tub of a man, squat and enormous, clad unconventionally in undershirt and trousers, after the habit of paper and pulp mill employees on the job. He had been delving around the beaters in the cellar below. The fiber "pudding" was fresh on his forearms and in his stubby brown mustache were shreds of dessicated spruce. He had a pear-shaped face, terminating in bulging jowls. Upon the crest of the cone that was his head shreds of drab hair were pasted, with a center part. Big, blue, bulging eyes, at sight of Mattie, rolled their own. Twin hoops they were of gentle reproach.

"Girlie," husked Pete, close to Mattie's little ear, "if you'd marry me, like I've asked you, you could cut out this cheap job!" He sighed asthmatically, pouting with displeasure.

Mattie's reply was direct; the manner of the mill folk contained no subtleties. More, it held a quality of precision; an exact essence of enumeration. For this the girl's daily task of counting, counting and still counting, was responsible.

"Aw, dishwater! Pete, this makes just twenty-one and a half times you've proposed to me. The half-time was the first, when you didn't really mean it. Now listen; get this, again! Nothin' doin'! Same old reasons: three of 'em. I ain't marryin'. You're too fat. You're too old."

"I ain't only thirty-two. And I might get thinner—"

"You're too old for *me*. And you kid yourself when you talk of gettin' thinner. G'wan, huckleboy, and leave me count!"

Sadly Pete departed, down to the nether regions next the flume where all was damp and dark, where the water went drip, drip, drip, and the soggy swirl of the grinders circled without ceasing, and the vats, like the love dreams of Pete, were full of slush.

"Too fat, huh?" thought Slavvery resentfully. "Is *that* so? Well, Mat, I *might* show you a trick before long that'd knock ya a twister!"

He had reached the grinder room, where the spruce wood, hacked by mechanically contrived knives, resolved itself into a liquid fiber, ceaselessly rotating in the vats that workmen watched, occasionally stirring the contents. But Pete did not linger therein. He passed through a smaller room wherein were a couple of "pudding" vats temporarily unused, the wood pulp still in them.

Once within this room Pete's actions grew oddly furtive. He pushed back the heavy door behind him. Casting about him glances of bug-eyed caution, he almost tiptoed to the nearest vat. Reaching down his plump arm into the opaque, sleazy mess of pulp to a point above the elbow he drew out a quart bottle. Uncorking it, while he glanced about apprehensively, he grabbed it by the neck and took a deep swallow of the contents. Jamming in the cork, he replaced the bottle in the "pudding" vat, wiped his lips on the back of a dimpled hand and went out into the main room.

Truth compels the admission right here that, following his surreptitious draft, Pete's round eyes acquired an added luster, his rather heavy manner an almost caperish blitheness, while his trudge became a swagger. He went about his bossing, amiably enough—for Pete's men always found him almost too considerate—while hope and a sly good humor played tag with each other athwart the flushed tallow that enlarged a most peculiar face.

Meanwhile, upstairs in the great machine room, where the Fourdriniers thundered and the steam billowed in spectral forms above the whirling dryer rolls, a conversation was in progress that might well have troubled Slavvery, had he known of it.

"Looks bad, Mal, like you say," Calomel Bly was shrieking, above the thunders of the twin machines. "But Pete must be a human siphon. He's on the job every day, with never an hour of lost time."

Malachi Gregg, the machine tender standing next to Bly, deepened his great voice a little. Dominating the uproar came his diapason chest tones, produced seemingly without effort to master that terrific din of synchronized lever and cog and rolls of differing size, from slender spindles to mammoth cylinders.

"Pete's just got a capacity; that's all, Cal. O' course, if he drank a still dry, 't wouldn't matter here, so long as he's on the job. Trouble is, on the Q T he's puttin' your force on the bum. Lot o' lost time chalked up in the shank of a month."

Some man, this young machine tender! Six and three in height, broad shouldered, deep of chest and with muscles rippling under ivory-hued skin as he stood with folded arms up by the head end. A sleeveless cotton undershirt and a sleazy pair of old black trousers comprised his working costume, in July or in December. It was always hot enough in that roaring and steam-laden room where the two machines ran without ceasing day and night, with three shifts of workers, except for the few hours at the week end when they were halted long enough to be tuned up by the millwrights.

Barefooted on the sloppy birchen floor stood Mal Gregg, looking with his rather

insolent black eyes and curling raven hair, his bold nose and square chin, a picturesque and elemental figure. For a year he had been at Blackwater, coming from the Fox River paper mill region in Wisconsin. Never, declared Bly, had the mills had so efficient a machine tender. His skill had brought him preference over the others, with a substantial addition to the high wages paid workmen of this class. He had qualified as a sort of assistant to Bly without the title.

However, his record contained a serious flaw. He was temperamental and given at times to unexplained tardiness at the change of tours, as the three daily shifts of eight hours each were called. Because he had so practical a command of his job, Bly passed over these infractions. A long career as superintendent of paper mills, dealing with one of the most difficult and individual types of workers to be found in the ranks of industry, had taught Cal philosophy.

"Depend on it," boomed Mal, "Pete's at the bottom o' this bootleggin' mess around here that Vardaman and his deputies are watchin'."

Down near the back end of the great Fourdrinier, where a shallow stream of grayish water seven feet wide flowed swiftly toward the speeding dryer rolls, sounded suddenly a scream like a maddened cat's.

It was the signal known to every news print mill, announcing a "break."

The dumpy little backtender, a smaller replica of Gregg as to costume, had squalled the warning. Then occurred hectic moments, appropriate enough for the reclamation of the fiber that would be later reeling off the presses of huge metropolitan dailies, bearing their screaming headlines of battle, murder and sudden death, of scandal and intrigue, of all the concomitants of the blessed interval of peace that has followed the World War.

While Bly stepped back, like a raging gorilla Mal Gregg leaped to the footboard, along which the backtender was already scampering, monkey-wise, screaming his curses. Gregg's thunderous tones mouthed oaths deep and terrible. Always this job of repairing a break, as from the beginning

in the mills of news print, was done with extraordinary agility, with passionate zest, and with sizzling vocal sulphur.

Along the running board the pair of them darted, tearing out the whizzing fragments of paper running at dizzying speed through the whirling dryers, thrusting practiced hands into deadly traps, working back to splice the wet sheet anew, for these breaks are always mended while the machine is running at the rate of hundreds of feet a minute. Meanwhile, the air was filled with steam, paper, torn tempers and profanity, and the floor at the side of the Fourdrinier piled high with shreds and patches of news, mounting toward the roof.

Within an incredibly short time the new sheet was running smoothly over the dryers, and under and up and between them, while Gregg and the backtender stood again at the head and the rear, easily with folded arms, ruminating over their cuds of tobacco as do their kind in untroubled moments. Meantime Bly went to other departments, looking for more trouble, and hoping he would find none since the mills were already behind on orders.

At noon the gong sounded for the lunch hour. The laborers and the shipping and finishing rooms knocked off, but the men in charge of the speed apparatus just reached for their lunch baskets and ate with one eye fixed on the machinery.

Reflectively, at last, big Gregg blew his last crumbs, straightened, yawned, and reaching down into a pocket of his atrocious trousers produced the "makin's" and rolled his own. That there was a stringent rule obtaining against the use of cigarettes in that room troubled him not at all. He rolled a black eye at the speeding sheet; she was running good.

"Be back in a minute," he called to his backtender, who squatted further down the room, his saturnine face surrounded by huckleberry pie. Then Gregg sauntered out and to the finishing room, where Mattie Briscoe and her bevy of assorted Hebes were eating their luncheons among the piled tiers of counted and uncounted "flats."

Barefooted, stalwart and débonair came Mal Gregg into that room, padding softly

and causing a big kick in many a feminine bosom. Gregg, whose sartorial at the weekly dances of the mill folk the previous winter had been as ornate as the workaday regimentals—to which everybody was accustomed—were simple, was accounted by common consent the sheik of Blackwater. Nevertheless, because of ugly rumors, many an humble laborer in the mills had toward spring refused to allow his daughters to attend those dances because Gregg frequented the functions.

Only by a narrowing of his insolent eyes, and a slight accentuation of his swagger did Gregg reveal consciousness of the battery of the girls' glances. There was in the big room but one magnet for his gaze, of added value because he was cordially detested in that quarter. And had been ever since the last dance late in the spring at Hook and Ladder Hall, when Mattie Briscoe had pulled away from him during a one-step and slapped his handsome face, while screaming to her astonished friends the explanation that he had "held her too darned tight."

Repeatedly since then had Gregg sought to renew acquaintance with Mattie, and with no luck, though his persistence was fairly satanic.

At this moment she was the only person in the room who was unaware of the sheik's entrance. Her slender back was toward him, her luncheon outspread upon the table before her. She was idly spooning at a saucer while absorbed in the columns of a newspaper.

To her padded Gregg, stood behind her, then slapped a huge, hairy paw familiarly upon her shoulder.

"Pussy speaking to papa to-day?" he growled, in a would-be jovial tone.

Mattie Briscoe never looked around. She knew that voice. Her gaze remained glued upon her newspaper. Thoughtfully she removed the spoon from the saucer. Then, with a lightning movement and unerring aim she flung over her shoulder straight into the leering face above it the contents of the saucer.

"Apple sauce!" purred Mattie. And it was just that.

Up rose the irrepressible laughter of the

damsels gathered round the counting board. Growling, Gregg left the room, savagely wiping apple sauce from eyes and stubbled face. Back to the machine room he went, and until the change of tours at three o'clock he was as ugly as a soreheaded bear.

It was, therefore, with added malice that, upon being relieved at the machine, he put into effect a quiet program which some days previously he had arranged to be a climax for this very evening.

Hurrying from the mills to the shabby little hotel where he lodged, he climbed into resplendent Palm Beach fabrics, white silk hose and polished brown Oxfords. A narrow brimmed sailor straw, with a red, white and blue band, completed the sheiking.

Over the hotel phone he then spoke a laconic message. A point four miles away, in the city county seat of Kahuahgo, received it.

"Gregg speaking. All set. Come on down. Stop at the Blackwater Inn for me. We'll get 'em right!"

At a little after five o'clock two touring cars stopped at the hotel, which was built opposite the mills the year after they had opened for business. Out piled sundry men, stalwart and palably of the square-headed and strong-jawed police type. These were greeted by Malachi Gregg, the demon machine tender, looking in his almost foppish summer vestments, dapper, débonair and a bit devilish.

A few moments later a wave of excitement ran through the Blackwater Mills with the speed and spreading quality of a prairie fire. Across the road and trolley track, down the graveled path which led through the strip of emerald lawn, came Mal Gregg and the black-mustached, slouch-hatted, trim-waisted Sheriff Horace Vardaman. Behind them tramped no less than four deputies. Coat lapels were flung jauntily back in the rising evening breeze, and the official shields glittered.

The squad passed William Elder, the aged retainer, venerable rounder of toil, who had been shaving the lawn. William paused in his endless circling. He leaned skinny elbows upon the handle of his lawn mower and watched the cohorts go by. William's

leathery expression might have meant anything. It probably did.

Like wildfire the word flashed through the mills:

"A raid! A bootlegger raid!"

With the suddenness of a summer shower, many wild and absurd rumors, which had been circulating lazily, fused in initiative that would mean the front pages in the northland's news of the morrow. For the better part of a year the new sheriff—held by some to be of the wild-eyed reformer type, and by others to be the most faithful guardian of Polk County's peace who had ever presided over the local jail—had been sharpshooting, gunshooting and unlimbering heavy artillery in the interest of local enforcement of the eighteenth amendment. And here he was, with his deputies, evidently determined to run down the rumors that the Blackwater Mills sheltered the principal Volstead lawbreakers in the county!

And nobody was more interested than the denizens of Blackwater!

Hungry-eyed, the sheriff walked with Gregg, the papermaking apostle of aridity. Vardaman prowled always in search of the tidbit of publicity. He took pride in the fact that his recent Wild West contraband liquor raids had won telegraphed paragraphs in the metropolitan papers. To behold his name in a headline was meat and drink to his vanity. This Blackwater situation, concerning which Gregg had been in communication with him for some weeks, promised to be the richest yet!

Across the narrow bridge to the door of the finishing room tramped the sextet. The door slowly opened. Upon the threshold appeared the superintendent, Calvin Calomel Bly, iron hat and all. Cal was not very large. However, somehow, everybody stopped. Which perhaps explained why, for thirty-five of his sixty years, Bly had been a full-fledged superintendent.

"What's yer business, gents?"

Impressively the sheriff, posing, handed Bly a folded paper which he withdrew from the inner pocket of his rakish gray Norfolk jacket.

"Search warrant, eh?" Cal drawled, scowling over the written "information and

belief." He looked up, straight at Gregg. For the first time since Mal had come to Blackwater a hard dislike for him, mingled with suspicion, shone in Bly's eyes.

"Cagey signatures, make-believe," commented Bly. "Which sneak are you, Gregg? John Doe or Richard Roe?"

"Don't abuse a man for upholding the law!" fussed the sheriff. While, despite himself, Gregg could not meet Bly's eyes.

"He can uphold the law outside these mills after to-day. Gregg, don't come back to work. You're through, right now! Now get me, sheriff! The stuff in this paper is news to me. Maybe it's true, and I'm a fossil, ready to be retired. All right; I'll take my medicine honest. But any skunk like this specimen here, that'll deliberately let his place of employment in for advertising like this, is *through*, by Judas priest! Gregg, you lead yer hounds around on the dirty work, then you get yer time!"

Gregg's lips twisted in an ugly snarl. He had not expected this. He had mistaken Bly's easy good nature. This soft berth of his he had expected to hold indefinitely. Besides, there were strategical reasons why he had wanted to stay unmolested.

With a sneer he led the sheriff and deputies past Bly, who had stood aside. The girls at the counting table had heard the superintendent's withering speech. Gregg's glance chanced to cross Mattie Briscoe's, directed toward him. Her look held a sparkling enmity that startled him.

Bly fell in behind the last two deputies. There was a little, scurrying rush, Mattie appeared beside him. The superintendent might have told her to go back to her work, but he did not. Somehow, whatever Mattie did seemed in the outcome to be for the good of affairs.

From the head of the procession came a booming voice. Gregg's, of course. "I know Slavvery's habits like a book. You'll just about catch him now with the goods on him. I been watchin' him."

So! Cal Bly's heart sank. He had heard some things here and there; the net was apparently closing about poor old Pete. *Old?* Yes, Pete must have been old from his 'teens. But—blast the hide of the Iscariot who had informed on a fellow work-

er! Despite Gregg's bulk, Bly would have liked to be in a room alone with him at that moment!

Down in the depths, where the water went drip, drip, drip, and the sludge circled in the vats, Pete Slavvery stood in the smaller grinder room where rested two vats temporarily not in commission. Pete was unearthing from the liquid pulp the bottle he had consulted earlier in the day. Withdrawing the cork he upended the slender neck to his mouth.

Just then, upon the concrete floor of the big outer room, he heard a trample of footsteps. Pete acted with amazing quickness for one so huge. Jamming the cork back into the bottle he plunged it down again into the ooze and straightened, just as the investigating party came in, after dramatically flinging back the closed door.

They stood looking at Pete. Pete looked back at them.

"That's him," growled Malachi Gregg. "That's Slavvery. That's yer man." Bly, pushing past a big deputy, surveyed Pete rather sorrowfully. Either Pete looked guilty or not guilty, he could not tell which. Pete's peculiar face was like that. It was a poker face. Either Pete could master his emotions, or he had none.

"Boys," boomed Gregg, "I been watchin' this fellow. Roll up your sleeves and dig down into this pulp. See what you find!"

And he indicated the beater beside which he stood. It was *not* the beater wherein Slavvery had cached his bottle.

Uprolling as directed, the deputies dived into the great round tub in which swam fragrant wood pulp unstirred by apparatus for nearly a fortnight. The evidence was exhumed; an even half dozen bottles of it.

Sheriff Vardaman extended hungry hands. Gravely he broke a seal. He applied a private corkscrew and worked with practiced hand. He sniffed, he tasted, he crowed with joy.

"Booze!"

Gravely he turned to Pete. "Slavvery, you are my prisoner!"

Came a clicking. Two of the deputies had handcuffed Pete. The other two stuffed their pockets with the evidence, hastily rub-

bing off the adhering sludge with bits of burlap which lay round about. The little party rightabout faced and, with the goggle-eyed Pete in the center, passed through the main beater room and went up the stairway to the big machine room. Trailing the group came Bly and Mattie Briscoe. Bly was worried. But for some reason the pretty face of the boss counter girl wore a look of quiet amusement.

In years of supervisory service for paper mills, Bly was not unacquainted with divers ways of law and order. A bootlegging raid was new to him. But he had been an expert witness on one summons and another, and his evidence had been sometimes called for, following arrests for strike disorders.

As the crowd reached the booming Four-driner which Gregg would captain no more, a great light illumined the Bly brain, that had been struggling for just that phenomenon. He darted forward, plucking Vardaman's sleeve, halting the parade, while he faced Pete.

"Slavvery!" squalled the super above the din, "do you know what this is all about?" About them came helpers; the machines ran as they would.

In the round eyes turned to his was an abysmal depth of incomprehension as Pete answered Bly.

"No. What is it?" And to the dumb-bell dregs of Pete, Bly believed in him. Triumphantly he turned to Vardaman.

"Sheriff," he squalled, "you'll be going off half-cocked once too often. You can't take this man; you've no real evidence!"

"Why haven't I evidence?" squealed the reform sheriff. "Here's Slavvery and here are the bottles!"

"You got Slavvery without a thing in his hands! On another man's say-so! Pete stood beside Number Two beater; you searched *Number One*. He says he knows nothin' about this contraband *and you ain't got any proof that he does!*"

The sheriff and his deputies, neatly caught, stared at one another. But now uprose another voice in a menacing growl, tintured with a malignant joy. It was the voice of Malachi Gregg.

"Boys, I forgot. I saw Slavvery yesterday down in that room, when he didn't

know I was there. *You go on back down and search Number Two beater!*"

Now, to the consternation of Cal Bly, Slavvery for the first time revealed a degree of agitation disconcerting to his loyal friends.

"Aw, nix!" bawled Pete, clasping imploring and manacled hands. "Nix, boys; nix!"

However, the deputies were already on their way. Gregg leered. The sheriff's dismay changed subtly to the hungry look. Pete Slavvery groaned while Bly stared at him as his heart registered woe.

It was so hard to conceive of Pete as a scoundrel! And these vague innuendoes of Gregg's, about Pete imbibing from a bottle, often and alone. So Gregg had spied upon him, and could testify upon ocular evidence as to his capacity! Slavvery's demeanor in this moment of trial left no doubt in the sorrowful superintendent's mind of his guilt. Yet how could he have contained so much of liquid damnation and remain sanely on his job?

Now into this tangled situation hurtled a brand new element. It assumed the form of a clear, cool, crisp voice, a girl's voice. A true sense of the dramatic little Miss Mattie Briscoe must have possessed to "horn in" at this particular moment.

"Sheriff, if you'll just back up in a straight line, and take three paces to the left, you'll come to two boards next the wall that *look* solid. They *ain't*. Lift 'em and see what you find! *Exhibits?* I got tired countin'!"

She *spoke* to Vardaman—but she was *looking* at—Malachi Gregg. Never slow to catch a new angle in a situation, Cal Bly saw Gregg's face whiten. And he moved quietly to cut off any sudden ambition Mal might conceive to leave the premises too suddenly.

Vardaman had pounced upon the designated spot, had lifted out the false boards and was excitedly drawing out from the space underneath slathers of bottles, replicas of the half dozen taken from the idle beater in the depths below. With his task only begun the sheriff rose, approaching Pete.

"You're a sly dog," he squawked, "if you *don't* look it!"

"Hold your horses!" commanded Mattie Briscoe. "Can't you see yet that they've *planted* Pete Slavvery? Snap out of it! I saw something suspicious a week ago; since then I've kept count. There are six men in on it that I've seen. For the last six nights they've fed out bottles to just thirty men and they've charged every one of 'em an even seven dollars and eighty-five cents a throw. Being near the border hammers the price down. Last night I heard two men, over by the coal dump, plottin' to call you in, sheriff, and plant Pete here. I didn't know one of 'em. But I'll swear in any court you ever saw that Mal Gregg here, *was the other!* I've been countin' the days to get even with this big stiff for insultin' me!"

Then suddenly, into this *mêlée*, intruded a yowling and lugubrious sound, an unearthly bleating, an outcry weirder than any contributed by the synchronized and whirring triumph of man's mechanical skill that was the Fourdrinier.

At last dumb old Pete Slavvery had caught the humor of the situation. And he was laughing his famous gargoyle laugh, heard about once a year; laughing like a sardonic hyena, full in the disgruntled Malachi Gregg's dismayed face.

Then Gregg went mad with hate and baffled malice. The laugh of Slavvery snapped the thin thread of surviving sense. There stood the fat, manacled dodderhead—and before the sheriff or Bly could prevent the cowardly act, Gregg's mighty right fist flashed and smashed Slavvery full in the face.

Nobody had ever knocked Pete down. Now, despite the power of the blow, he did not even stagger. While the blood spurted, spreading from his flattened nose, he stared stupidly at Gregg—and continued to laugh. Beside himself Gregg struck blindly again; his foot slipped on the wet floor; he went caroming off Pete's protuberant belly into the snarling Fourdrinier; there was a yell of mortal agony.

It was lucky for Gregg that the machine tender who had relieved him stood far down, close to the levers. Like an ape he sprang to them at that agonized scream. They dragged Gregg, in his gory finery, from the

murderous dryer rolls with what are figured as minor casualties in the grim paper making business.

He suffered only a cracked rib and the loss of half of his right hand.

Fellow workmen had him stretched on a strip of burlap farther up the floor, when the deputies appeared bearing the additional evidence desired for the incrimination of Slavvery.

At sight of the sleuths advancing with the object that the foremost held gingerly by the neck, Slavvery displayed renewed agitation that the hard fist of Gregg had not been able to induce.

"Only one bottle in the whole dang tub," bawled the deputy to the sheriff, "but that looks to be half empty!"

Greedily Vardaman reached for the exhibit. Perhaps, after all, Slavvery could also be implicated! He drew out the cork; he smelled, scowled and tasted. He spat out the mixture with every appearance of distaste. He looked on the sides of the bottle, but the original label had been soaked off in the sludge of the vat.

"For Pete's sake!" he screamed at Slavvery above the never resting din, "what is this stuff?"

Slavvery's reply, given with the bashfulness of either a young boy or a man in love, will live forever in the traditions of Blackwater.

He rolled hoop eyes, above a bloody face, at the listening Mattie Briscoe. He stood on one foot like an ostrich. He clasped manacled hands in pensive fashion.

"I was doin' it for *her*," he yodled. "She thought I was a trifle too hefty to think o' marryin' yet. I been takin' it on the sly for weeks. It's anti-fat!"

While Gregg lay groaning farther up the floor, Bly and the assen bled machine tenders and backtenders hugged one another

and wept with merriment. Sheriff Vardaman looked lost. Mattie Briscoe, with color flaming, walked straight up to the simpering Pete Slavvery and bit off cold words with cruel, tiny, white teeth.

"Pete, you big blatherskite!" she grated, "if Gregg hadn't beat you up already, I'd jam that darned old bottle down your fat throat!"

Whereupon, with militant dignity, she marched away from there.

A half hour later Calvin Calomel Bly came upon William Elder, the goat bearded patriarch, in the tool house at the end of the lawn. William was putting up his lawn mower.

In the cold eyes of the superintendent dawned an expression that was new for William. It was one of uncertainty, almost of distrust. The strange events of the afternoon, since their discussion of the morning, wholly justified this change in Bly's mind. He had believed this goatish old philosopher pretty nearly infallible. How, now?

"William," quoth Bly severely, "Gregg's on his way to jail with three fingers gone. Slavvery's gone home to plaster his nose. You know everything, don't you?"

"Eyuh." William stroked his whiskers.

"Last thing you told me this mornin'," pursued Bly in challenge, "was that if the fool sheriff ever got after Pete Slavvery he was due to find out somethin'."

"Well," placidly, "he *did*, didn't he?"

"What did he find?"

"The right feller."

Then the stare of Calvin became a real tribute. William wagged a sage gray head.

"If you'd ever used your head, Cal, you'd know Pete was honest. He's too danged iggorunt to be anything else."

And Bly went away from there more than ever convinced that in wisdom Solomon never had anything on William!

THE END



COMING SOON—A Great New Serial of the West
SEÑOR JINGLE BELLS - - BY MAX BRAND



Enchantment

By JACK BECHDOLT

GEORGE KAY stood uncertainly on the outside of a gate, regarding it with a glazed eye that saw little.

Though the day was in late fall and bitter he was without a hat, his thin coat blew open and he had torn loose the collar of his shirt to bare his throat and chest, for the man was burning up within.

George Kay's shoes were covered with mud and soaked with water and his trouser legs were wet and muddy almost to the knees, for he had been through fields and ditches in his erratic progress from a forgotten past toward a dubious future. He weaved a little dizzily as he studied the gate with his brilliant, stupid eyes and one might easily be excused for thinking the big, hulking, bedraggled and bareheaded fellow more than slightly drunk with liquor.

There had been other gates in the little town of Milledge, one in particular, an iron gate between high granite pillars and a savage dog in the yard beyond it. There had been doors, too, doors of prosperous

small town houses and humble cottage doors, of many colors and kinds and sizes, but alike in that they had invariably slammed in his face before his thick tongue could explain how it was with him.

This last gate was at the edge of the little town. There was no other house except the garage at the bend of the road. It was a gate of wooden slats, several broken off and the remainder badly in need of paint.

George got the gate open, or it opened of its own accord—at least he seemed to float through it with a curious effect of levitation. Then he found himself facing a girl. Her face was etched clearly in his consciousness for a moment, not a pretty face perhaps, but very vital and comforting to a fainting soul. He noted the girl was tanned like a gypsy and there was a spatter of freckles across the bridge of her short nose. Her eyes were dark and looked on him with an alert interest, a little startled but not unfriendly.

"Lady," George whispered. "Lady—excuse. I—I—"

The old, bothersome weakness took his knees and he was conscious of falling forward a vast distance.

But he did not fall, for in reality the long, strong arms of Patricia McGurl, eldest of the six young McGurls, received him. Though his weight was staggering Patricia braced her active, coltlike legs and held him at the cost of all her strength. She got him braced against the fence and regarded him closely.

"Glory!" she exclaimed, "you're not drunk at all!"

"Sick," George Kay whispered feebly. "Sick—help me—"

He sagged against the fence without further speech, propped at a perilous balance and Patricia McGurl studied her find. He was not any young man of Milledge. A stranger. A handsome stranger, too! The fever had given his face a flush and the blinded eyes were large and brilliant. "Glory!" said Patricia, "he looks like Doug Fairbanks—just a little!"

The sick man's breathing was rasping and erratic. He threatened at any moment to collapse on the wet ground. The chilly wind whipped at him and a few drops of rain fell. "You'll catch your death out here!" Patricia cried. "Come along; yes, you've got to."

She got one of George's arms wound about her slender shoulder and with her other encircled him, half dragging, half supporting him. Patricia had in mind the barn. It was to the barn she took the various waifs and strays she had nursed—a long succession of lame dogs, sick cats, a bird with a broken wing, even a vagrant goat. Welcoming the strays was the thing Patricia McGurl did best, but her family did not acclaim her for it. Recalling the clamor of protest over her last adventure with the goat she had grave doubts even as she urged the sick man onward.

But at the cottage door she paused. For shame, to lodge the stranger in a stable with the goat! The poor young man, so sick and handsome! The best was none too good for him! Patricia led the patient stumbling into the front parlor and got him on the

sofa, glad that the other McGurls were not at home to interfere.

She felt the fever in the man's burning, dry cheeks and tried with a cloth and water to cool it. After that she was at a loss. The big bulk of George Kay sprawled uncouthly on the sofa. His eyes were open but without intelligence. Every breath cost him a struggle. Every inch of him looked ill.

So young, so good to look upon and so in need of help! Patricia took on a great responsibility. She went to the party line telephone and called Dr. Reed.

Thus the McGurls discovered themselves possessed of a guest, a guest like to die—sure to die if he was moved out again. The doctor was specific on that point. "His one chance is to stay where he is. If you want his death on your head, throw him out," he said grimly.

The wrath of Al McGurl passed all bounds. "Who's to pay for all this?" he bellowed. "Answer that? Who's to pay? Not me, by all that's holy—"

The doctor shrugged. "Well, McGurl, I'll gamble my time. If I pull him through I guess I can collect from him, somehow—"

"Food, nurses, medicine, you think that grows on trees for poor folks like us?" McGurl wailed.

"I'll nurse him," Patricia announced. "I can do it—"

"You!" her father roared. "You, without any more sense than to bring him in here! You that goes around the country collecting every half dead mongrel—"

"I can do it," Patricia affirmed. "Didn't I cure the goat?"

"I think she can do it," Dr. Reed agreed. "She's young and strong. Fortunately it's pneumonia and no danger to you."

Al McGurl seized his head in his two hands and howled while his wife sat with her apron over her eyes and the young McGurls shrank into corners and under the furniture.

Patricia turned on him. "Shame on you, a black shame!" she cried. "And that poor young man in there like to die. Be still now! Be still! I won't have it!" She approached her father with fire in her black eyes, stamping her foot angrily.

Al McGurl suddenly held his breath. When his eldest daughter looked like that he was afraid.

"Doctor, the young man will stay," Patricia said with dignity. "Nobody can say that the McGurls turned a fellow creature out to die in the ditch. Now, hush your row, all of you." She quit the kitchen where this conference was being held, closing the door to the sick room with significant finality.

"That girl will make a good nurse—a splendid nurse," the doctor approved. He, too, vanished to give her instructions. Al McGurl uttered a hollow groan and transferred his anger to his patient wife.

II.

PATRICIA'S face was the first thing George Kay recognized after an interminable confusion of time. That alert, vital, tanned little visage with its sprinkle of freckles across the short nose was his first link between past and present. It recalled the gate with the broken palings and a dim memory of the little town and its other inhospitable gates. But beyond that was only a dim confusion, a nightmare of muddy fields, of falls into ditches, nothing more. It made his head pain fearfully to try to piece all that together.

The man's strength came back readily. His convalescence was satisfactory to Dr. Reed and a source of vast pride to Patricia, who had added one more triumph to her long list of patients including the goat. But his memory halted peculiarly at the recollection of the town and its gates and Patricia.

"He's nothing but a half wit!" Al McGurl exclaimed in disgust. "They'll be taking him off to the asylum!"

Dr. Reed shook his head. "He's all right. Perfectly sane and normal, never fear. It's only his memory that's gone and that's probably the fever. It will wear off in time. Why, he's talking already about finding some kind of work so he can pay off the expense he's caused us—"

McGurl brightened. "Is he now? Sure, I'll have a little talk with the fellow. I can use a hand in the garage—"

"A fine idea," the doctor agreed. "Only see he has light work for a while—"

"He can mind the gas pump," McGurl decided. "Later, maybe he can be of use to me. He looks strong. If he's any good he can board with us and I'll pay him—let's see—ten dollars a week. I'll keep half of it toward my expense and give you the other half on your bill," he added grimly, "and I'll see that the big bum earns it!"

"I guess you'll do that," the doctor conceded dryly.

III.

THEY called him George, for he could remember no other name. He took up his duties in the garage with a will, eager to repay his debt. He made his home in the barn where the goat had lived, converting an old storeroom into passable quarters.

Al McGurl saw to it that he earned his ten dollars a week. George was made a very useful man. Besides supplying gas, oil and water to the many cars that stopped, he was given plenty of hard, dirty jobs. When a car was to be washed, George washed it. Such mucky tasks as draining crank cases and cleaning out the drip pans fell to him without argument, and he accepted them without question.

George was strong, too, incredibly strong. When McGurl had occasion to put a car on trestles to get at the gears or the rear end, he no longer used jacks or chain gear. He called in George who bowed his back and lifted.

George was strong, but slow and hopelessly clumsy with hands and head. Before the mechanical problems of machinery he was helpless, fit to do exactly what he was told to do and no more; utterly incapable of putting together what he took apart.

"Look at that, will you?" McGurl would rave. "Can't even trust you to get a gasket on right! Gada'mighty, what butter fingers—"

"I'm not a mechanic, Mr. McGurl—"

"No, and you never will be! Hell!"

McGurl growled and grumbled and drove and taunted from dawn to dark. He was collecting his debt with interest. George bore with him for he acknowledged the obligation.

And the rest of Milledge was inclined to take McGurl's appraisal of him. George had nothing in common with the young fellows of the little village. He held himself aloof, spending what little leisure he had alone in long walks or in his barn lodging. There was a difference there, a sharply marked difference. George referred to the village youths as "Townners." There was not so much contempt in the term as a sense of distinct difference.

"What's townners?" Patricia asked.

George looked dazed. "Why—townners, that's all. Just townners."

He had a fight with one of the young loafers who sometimes honored the garage with their presence. Resenting a remark made in Patricia's presence he went into action and had his vast strength been given the opportunity somebody would have got badly hurt. But the loafer could box passably and George was ridiculously outclassed, for all his muscle. Patricia stopped the fight.

She leaped between the combatants, her eyes wide with anger, her hair flying. "You can find something better than a sick man to fight, I think," she cried scathingly. "Go home and beat your mother, Hod Graham!"

She surveyed the disappearing, crestfallen group with scorn. "The dirty townners," she snorted.

George, shamefacedly bathing his bruised eye at the faucet, looked up to grin gratefully.

So Milledge wrote him down as a harmless, form of half-wit, to be laughed at, but not in the presence of Patricia McGurl.

For Patricia believed in George all the time. George was her own personal triumph, far more thrilling than the reclaimed goat. He was her star patient. When he would let her, Patricia would follow him anywhere. She delighted to run over to the garage and talk to him as he labored. She delighted to take walks with him. She discussed all of her numerous and kaleidoscopic plans, hopes and aspirations with George, when George had time to listen.

Patricia was going on seventeen and young for her age. She had yet that colt-like look with her black hair usually flying loose and her legs too long for her skirts.

She was without self-consciousness or feminine guile—a sexless person of mad, generous impulses, wrapped up in this queer piece of human flotsam she had saved from the grave.

Patricia came into the garage on a March afternoon, tossing her hair and muttering aloud in sputters of indignation. George concealed beneath a car at one of his grimy tasks saw her pace the floor and heard her angry declaration, "They make me sick, the townners. Nothing but smart Aleck townners, that's what they are!"

"Who makes you sick, kid?" he inquired, emerging into view.

"Everybody," Patricia declared. "Everybody. Hod Graham and all the boys, yes, and my father and all the rest of 'em, too, all but Dr. Reed—"

"What they been doing to you, Patsy?"

"Nothing!" She flushed and scuffed her boot toe across the floor. "Yes, they did, too!" she amended. "They laughed at you, that's what. They were all down in the post office and I went in for the mail and somebody—it was Hod Graham—made a smart crack about you. He said I always had some kind of a sick goat around the place, but this last one I found didn't even have sense enough to put up a fight—"

"He did?" George asked thoughtfully.

"Yes, but I guess I got even! I just lit in and told them they didn't begin to know anything about you, and when you got back your memory this little town would be pretty sick to find out who you really are—"

"You told 'em that, kid?"

"You bet I did. I just lit into them! 'If you weren't nothing but a lot of hicks and townners I guess you'd recognize a person of some importance when you see one,' I told them—"

"Hunh!" George said doubtfully. "Pat, do you honestly think I'm as good as all that?"

"Of course, you are. Anybody can see you don't belong in a place like this—anybody with sense. Oh, George, don't you remember yet what it is you used to be? Think, George, think hard!"

George rubbed his dirty face with a dirtier hand. "God!" he groaned, "don't I try. But it 'll come back all right. The

doc says to give it time. It's got to come back!"

Patricia sighed. Then she brightened. "Oh, boy, when you do remember! George, it's kind of like a fairy story, isn't it? You remember about the prince that was made into a toad by an old witch and then when they took the spell off him and he came out of the toad skin all in silk and satins and jewels—oh, boy! We'll have the laugh on this town then—"

"You tell 'em, kid!" George agreed. "I was something good, I know that. I had talent, I tell you! I can feel it in me. Some day we'll have the laugh on them all, Pat."

"Hunh! the towners!" Patricia's eyes sparkled with fierce pride in the anticipation.

A funny kid! George couldn't think of her without feeling a lump in his throat and a foolish moisture in his eyes. A funny, freckle-faced little devil. She had saved his life and now her friendship and belief in him was about all that kept him from going off his nut altogether what with the loneliness of this alien little hole and the drudgery of canceling his debt to it. A funny little kid!

An automobile horn squawked impatiently from the road. "Somebody after gas," George observed.

"I'll go," Patricia volunteered. "Go on with your job."

George, busied with his work, was aware of several distant voices and then Patricia's tones raised suddenly: "Yes, you will, too, pay for that gas and oil, Hod Graham! My father says—" She broke off with a sharp cry, "George!"

George came at a run.

A small light roadster stood by the gas pump, Hod Graham's little, cheap car and it was Graham's face that peered out, jeering at the girl who demanded payment. The machine started away from the pump, Graham laughing uproariously.

The car was in low gear, rolling past George. Then it ceased to roll. Though the engine kept on and the wheels scuffed up the gravel the car stood still. George had reached out a big hand and caught at the spare tire carrier in the rear.

George bowed his back. The rear of the car left the ground, its wheels buzzing

angrily. George trundled it back to the garage door and dropped it with a slam.

Before the astonished driver could do anything, George reached in, wound his hand in Graham's coat collar and lifted him out, kicking and waving his arms. Hod Graham was helpless in his grip and near to strangulation. His face was red and his eyes stuck out with fear.

"Apologize and pay the girl," George growled.

"I was only funning, Patricia," Graham gasped. "Here!" he proffered the price of the gas and oil.

"That'll do," George conceded, and tossed him idly to one side. Graham went stumbling.

"There, kid," said George grinning, "I guess that'll teach him your sick goat isn't dead yet—"

"George!" Patricia screamed and pointed behind him.

Hod Graham had fetched up in the heap of scrap iron beside the garage door and he seized the first convenient weapon, a slender steel brake rod. Graham poised the rod to deal George a wicked blow as the latter whirled about. The rod caught George on the shoulder and his hand closed over it, twisting it from Graham's clutch.

George stared curiously at the slender rod, holding it between his outstretched fists. Almost quicker than the eye could follow his hands performed an evolution. The straight rod doubled into a loop. Another manipulation and another loop, transforming the bar into a neat steel bowknot before Graham's staring eyes.

George shook the thing in Graham's face. "Next time I'll bend one of these around your head," he said sternly. "Now, get out."

Graham's little car went buzzing down the road. George looked at the twisted brake rod, examining it thoughtfully. His eyes began to shine. "Pat!" he exclaimed, a queer vibration of excitement in his tone. "Pat, I've got it now—I remember who I am—"

"Oh, George!"

George beamed. "You were right, kid. I'm some good after all. I'm something you can be proud of—"

"Oh, George, what—"

"I felt all the time I never belonged in a dump like this!" George beamed. "I got talent, all kinds of talent—"

"Oh, George—"

"It was that brought it all back to me," George said, indicating the iron bowknot he had tied. He bowed grandly before her, the twisted steel confection extended for her approval. "I am an actor, Pat."

IV.

GEORGE pledged the girl to secrecy.

"We'll show these towners!" he promised, while Patricia glowed. "We'll give this dump something to talk about. You wait and see! You're sure that show comes every year—"

"Every May," Patricia promised eagerly. "And it's swell, too—"

"Yeah, a good show," George agreed with patronizing air. "A pretty fair little outfit, though I've played with better. Why, I had ten weeks with Pantages circuit, one winter! But this will do. I'll write 'em to-day, sure. And mind you, don't spill a word, not a hint, kid—"

"Cross my heart," Patricia promised. "George, I'd die before I let on one word! Oh, boy!"

George wrote his letter. In time an answer came. He let Patricia look at it one day when they were alone in the garage. It was on beautiful paper, the envelope and letter head embossed in four colors and gold. Its contents were entirely satisfactory.

Later an express package came to George and was received by him without explanation and locked up in his little room.

"That big bum is framing something on me," Al McGurl confided to his family. "He's up to some devilment. Patricia, I bet you know—"

"Why, father!" Patricia exclaimed, suddenly dignified, "as if I had the slightest personal concern with the private affairs of a mere roughneck like George!"

McGurl thumped the dinner table for emphasis while he scowled on them all. "I'll just say this," he promised, "and you can tell it to George if you feel like it: If

that tramp figures he's going to light out of here before he's paid me every cent he owes, he's got another guess coming. I can have the law, if I've a mind to!"

On a mild night of early April, Patricia found George sitting alone in the dusk on the bench before the garage door. His chin was cupped in his hand and his cold pipe clenched between his teeth. George grunted scarcely audible answers to the girl's conversation, staring straight ahead of him into the dusk, his face drawn with pain.

Patricia asked finally, "George, what's the matter with you. Isn't everything going to be all right?"

"It's the damn frogs croaking that way," George muttered. "I never heard anything so lonesome in my life. Seems like I just can't stand this hole another minute. I've got to go, Pat—"

"Oh, you can't!" Patricia whispered desperately. "George, you wouldn't run away now—and never let these towners know who you are? You wouldn't let them laugh at me all my life—"

"It's awful!" George groaned. "I'm not used to it. I was brought up in the show business, Pat—crowds of folks—a lot of lights and noise—and bands playing—"

He broke off as a freight whistled on the distant railroad grade, its mournful, mysterious wailing singing to a vagrant heart of far places beyond the horizon of Mill-edge.

"Oh, God!" George shuddered and covered his face.

Patricia clutched his arm as if to prevent flight. She pleaded eagerly, "But you'll stay, won't you? You're going to show these towners you're somebody, aren't you? You'll stay—for me?"

"I'll stay," George promised. "You bet we'll show them! But gosh, kid, you don't know how hard it is when a man's been in the show business all his life, used to the bright lights and all—an actor with talent buried in this little dump—"

"Oh, don't I? And I suppose you think I like this little hole!"

"Hunh!" said George, surprised at this new notion. "Why, you always lived here, Pat—"

"It's nothing but a mud hole!" Patricia

cried angrily. "Nothing in it but a lot of hick towners! I hate it. I'll get away, too, some day, you see if I don't!"

"Now, look," George said, all big brother. "That's not a nice way for a girl to talk. You forget that stuff, see? And run along in, now; your ma's calling you."

V.

EARLY in May every shed and barn in Milledge blossomed with the rainbow billing for Harker's Mammoth Shows and Carnival of Wonders. The youth of the little town greeted this blooming with rapt attention and mounting enthusiasm, and the oldsters were not far behind, for Milledge boasted few amusements, not even a regular movie. Of all the admirers of this pictorial art none was so enthralled as Patricia McGurl, whose bosom was near to bursting with the momentous secret she shared only with George.

Harker's shows came eventually, on a perfect day, and the countryside for miles about turned toward Milledge and the tented wonders. Al McGurl decided to take his entire family, since he had been given passes in recognition of a small repair job to one of the wagons.

"I guess George has got sense enough to sell gas and oil for one afternoon," he announced.

"Can't he see the show?" Patricia wailed.

"See the show? Say, what the hell! I don't pamper any bums around this place! Your big tramp gets sick on us, then lives off us all winter, and now you think I ought to take him to a show! If he's got any idea in his head like that I'll tell him where he gets off!"

Patricia contented herself with telling them all that it was a dirty, mean trick. So terrible was the excitement she labored under she could scarcely act her part any longer.

She found time to slip over to the garage before the family left for the show grounds. George was puttering about in his faded, oil smeared, denim overalls. His face and hands were dirty, his hair tousled. It was almost incredible that that rough exterior

could harbor such refined and splendid talent. Patricia had an awful moment of doubt.

"Will you sure come?" she whispered. "Honest? Will you do it?"

"Absolutely," George promised heartily.

Patricia stared at him enthralled in worship. Her black eyes were big with excitement, her black hair flying—a coltish, long legged little girl, every inch of her. "Oh, George!" she cried shakily, and her lip began to quiver. She ran away to hide her eyes.

The McGurls had splendid reserved seats, close up, where they could see everything. All Milledge was in the tent, and Patricia passed Hod Graham and his cronies with a contemptuous toss of her head and proudly curling lip.

The band blared, the flap of the dressing tent lifted and the parade circled the tent. The show was on. Patricia didn't see it. To her it was a mad confusion of sound and movement while she waited breathless, her fingers twining with anxiety. Every breath hurt her like a knife.

"Laydees and genl'men, your attention is kindly in-vit-ed to the center stage, if you please!"

The ringmaster's stentorian voice drew every eye while the band hushed and the rings cleared.

"We take pleas-ure in pre-sent-ing for the first time in your litt-le cit-y the world re-nowned and fam-ous Mon-see-yur George-es De Kay in his breath tak-ing feats of strength and daring! Lad-ees and Genl'men, Mon-see-yur De Kay!"

The band crashed a chord.

Patricia McGurl had gone white. She leaned far out, half rising from her seat, the black eyes blazing.

The tent was silent in this great moment, silent except for the maddening drone of the candy butchers, "Peanuts, popcorn and cones! Get 'em red hot, folks!"

"Mon-see-yur De Kay!" the ringmaster repeated and stared about him anxiously.

Somebody laughed, then somebody else, excited to mirth by the stage wait.

"Gada'mighty!" Al McGurl snarled, rising suddenly. "Look't him — there's George!"

"George!" Patricia shrieked.

All the McGurls stared, rising hastily. All about people stared with them.

"The big bum!" McGurl choked, his face red with anger. "Gone and jumped the job. I'll show him something—"

Regardless of clutching hands, Al McGurl climbed the rope barrier and went into the ring as George, emerging from somewhere under the seats, trotted leisurely across the open toward the center stage. Al McGurl, following with shouts of vengeance, was hurled back by an alert ring hand and bade to go sit down.

Then all Milledge began to roar, "George!"

It was a roar of derision, with catcalls and shouts of laughter. But George, standing alone on the center stage, spotlighted in his greasy overalls, merely smiled professionally, bowed, and seizing his greasy mechanic's cap, sent it sailing into the tent top. He kicked with infinite grace and a shoe went sailing off, then the other. One writhing contortion and the grimed clothes fell from him and were kicked aside. George Kay stood revealed before their astonished gaze, a figure of gleaming, rippling muscles in red tights and spangles, at home amid the shining apparatus of a circus strong man.

After a long, painful gasp, Milledge shouted again, and twice as loud, a shout of applause. George Kay bowed low with hands outspread and began to do his stuff.

VI.

AL MCGURL *received* a fifty-dollar bill from George with awe. "You didn't have to be in any sweat about that, honest Mr. Kay," he protested anxiously. "You were always welcome at our house, you know—"

"Thanks," George said grimly. "I guess I know how welcome I was with you. I did the work of a twenty-five-dollar man for ten—and I'd be working till next Christmas paying off what you think I owe you, if you had your way."

He turned to Dr. Reed, proffering another bill. You treated me white, doc. Much obliged—"

"But why on earth didn't you tell us?" the doctor exclaimed. "How long since you remembered this—"

"Quite some time," George admitted. "I kept it dark on account of a particular lady friend of mine." He grinned at the beaming Patricia.

"I was filling in a few weeks with a carnival outfit that played over in Davenport last fall," George explained. "I came down sick and they took me to a hospital. I guess my watch and papers are still in the safe, there. But I got the nutty idea the show was pulling out, and they couldn't go on without my act. I wandered off and tried to follow them, and that's how I got here."

"And here we had a famous man in town all winter and never knew it at all!" McGurl gasped.

"I knew it all the time!" his daughter declared shrilly. "I told you so, too, but nobody ever will listen to me!"

George turned on her with a nod of confirmation. "I guess maybe they'll listen to you after this! Come on, Patsy, you and me will take a little walk."

George Kay ate supper with the McGurls, an honored guest. He did all the talking, nothing loath to tell them how good he really was, and the many places he had been and the brilliant people he knew. He had to take his leave early for the night show. "But I'll be back to say good-by before the train pulls out," he promised. "You'll be waiting, Pat?"

Patricia nodded shyly.

But when George returned to pay his last respects to the McGurls the family was assembled, all but Patricia. They could not find her. Shouts and search availed nothing.

George had to go, finally. "It's funny; damn funny," he muttered, alone in the night, bag in hand. "I thought the kid really liked me. I sure did!"

He paused uncertainly, strolling toward the garage.

The frogs were singing and a distant freight engine sent its mysterious, beckoning hoot echoing across the quiet, sleeping countryside. "God!" George shuddered. "What a hole!"

He allowed himself the luxury of a moment alone on that bench before the garage where he had sat so many lonely nights, hating the frogs' chorus. Something sniffled in the darkness and tried to slip away.

George caught a thin wrist and clung to it while the girl struggled like a wild thing.

"Pat!" he exclaimed. "Why, kid, I came to tell you good-by, and I darn near missed seeing you! Listen, Patsy, promise you won't forget me—"

"I will!" she whispered venomously.

"I'll be coming back, you know! I'll make it a point to join out with this show next spring—just to see you again—"

"You won't find me here! Think I'm going to sit on this bench waiting—waiting all my life—listening to those d-damn frogs. I will not. And I hope I never see you again—"

"Why, kid!" George exclaimed. hurt. "Why, Pat—"

"Let go of me! Let me go. Go on, you'll miss your train!" She fluttered in his grasp, her face averted. "Go away," she choked, "I despise you—despise you—"

George Kay slipped an arm about her

shoulders, holding her fast, turning her face toward him. His free hand found and lighted a match. He held it up, staring into her eyes.

"Good Lord!" he said shakily. "Good Lord, Patsy!"

Something had happened in those few minutes, some enchantment of the night, an enchantment that made his own butterfly transformation a cheap and tawdry showman's trick.

It was not the funny, freckle nosed, colt-like girl George Kay saw. The face was Patricia's, but another Patricia—a woman grown—with a woman's capacity to love and sorrow showing through those tragic eyes.

"Kid," George whispered shakily, "I know! We love each other, that's it! You'll come with me?"

Patricia pressed her face against his shoulder, bunting him with her head. "Yes."

"Then hustle like the devil!" George cried. "We got to tell your folks and beat it for that train. Minister to-morrow, next town we make. And Pat! What an act we'll do together, you and me!"

THE END

YOU ARE NOT MINE

YOU are not mine. The sea with all its mournful
Gay might, belongs not to the waiting shores.
You are not mine, oh, insolent and scornful,
You are not mine—but I—oh, I am yours!

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(An extract from a letter from Mrs. Arthur R. Pagnam, R. F. D. No. 29, Stamford, Conn.)

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"AT the age of forty I found myself slipping in health. I was troubled with indigestion, constipation and nervous debility. I had read about people taking Fleischmann's Yeast, and ordered some. A while later, in answer to a friend's inquiry, I was surprised to hear myself reply, 'I feel like a prize-fighter' and realized then that I had not felt any sign of indigestion for some time, and was putting in ten to twelve hours' hard brain work daily. I knew I was back again."

(A letter from Mr. W. L. King of Washington, D. C.)

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THE BIG KNIGHT By Edgar Franklin
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GLADYS, NUMBER TEN By Margaret Busbee Shipp
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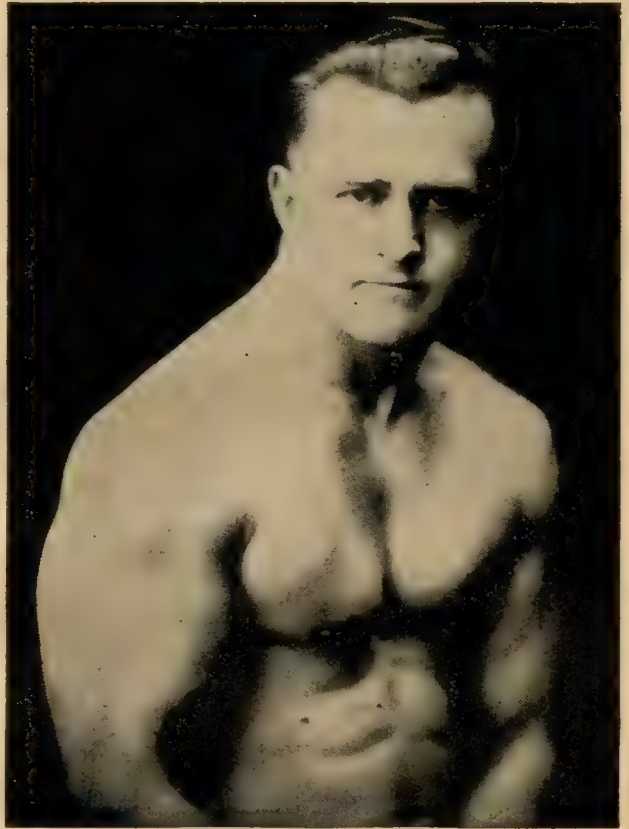
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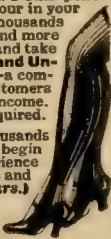
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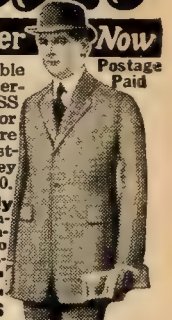
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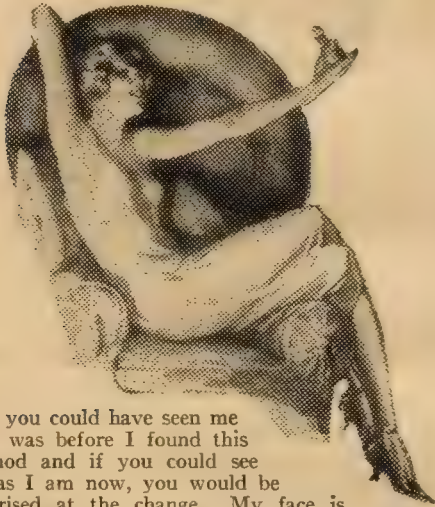
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If you could have seen me as I was before I found this method and if you could see me as I am now, you would be surprised at the change. My face is now smooth, and free not only from hair, but from pimples and blemishes.

This method of mine is different from anything you have ever used. It is not a powder, paste, wax or liquid, not a razor, not electricity. It causes no burning or itching and leaves no scars. It removes superfluous hair and makes the skin smooth, soft and attractive.

Thousands of other women who also had despaired of ever being free from superfluous hair have found relief through this method. Letter after letter like the following come to me:

"Am so happy with the results. The growth of hair on my face has entirely disappeared."

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With this method, which I call by my own name—Lanzette—your trouble with superfluous hair will be over. A trial will prove it.

Send for My Free Book

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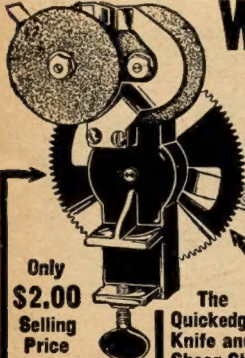
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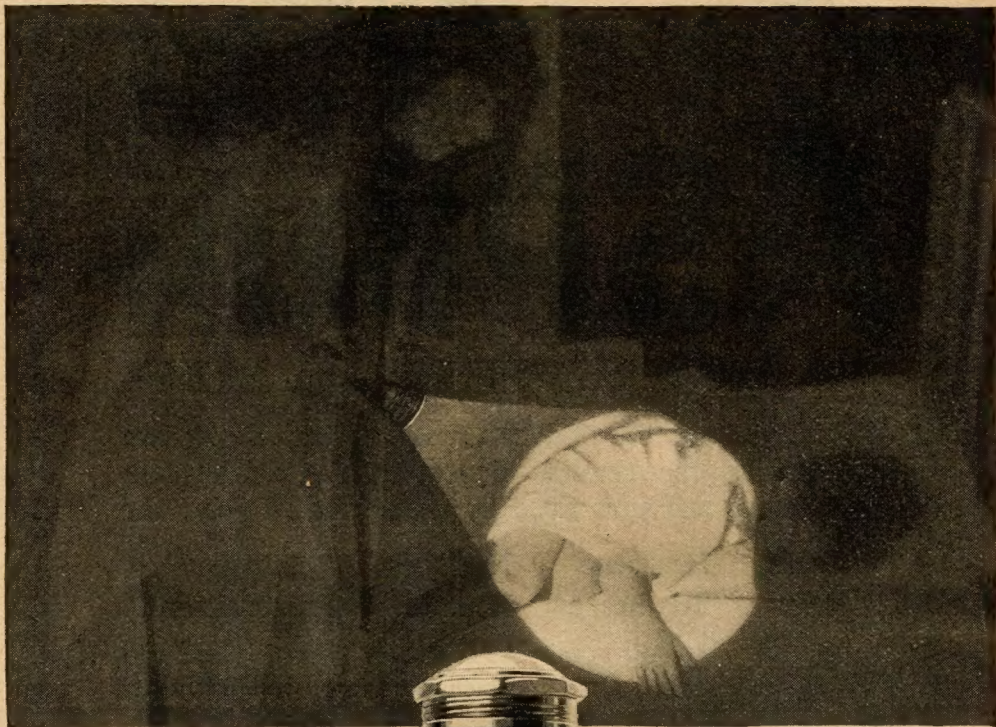
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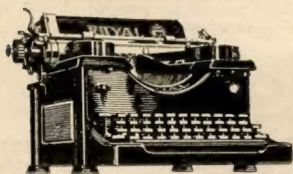
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